

**Review: Richard Taruskin's *The Oxford History  
of Western Music*<sup>1</sup>  
Part 1**

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**Introduction**

Among the most persistent criticisms of Modernist music since the dawn of the twentieth century has been its failure to win "the audience," i.e., the traditional audience for concert music. The implication is that it has failed to enter the standard concert repertoire of symphony orchestras, chamber ensembles, and the like. Justifications of Schoenberg's music by his students usually focused on the connection of his work to the great Classical tradition, with the implied or stated promise that eventually—despite the difficulties it presented to contemporary listeners—it would be understood by future audiences and recognized as part of the Classical pantheon.

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<sup>1</sup> This review was conceived as the third section of an extended essay, whose first two parts were published as "The Legitimation Crisis of Progressive New Music in the United States: Sections I-II," in *Sonic Ideas/Ideas Sónicas*, Mexican Center for Music and Sonic Arts (CMMAS), Fall 2011. Two sets of terms from that paper must be briefly defined.

In an earlier article, "Musical Progress? New Music and Perils of Progressivist Historicism" (Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, Wolfram Schurig, eds., *The Foundations of Contemporary Composing* [Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2004], pp. 11-34), I employed the term "progressivist historicism" in order to describe those conceptions of history that view it as a sequence of necessary stages on a progressive path toward a not-yet-realized future state. These conceptions are distinct from restorationist historical models whose aim is a revolution (i.e., a return) back to an imagined Golden Age. Since the twentieth century, reactionary historicist models have often borrowed a dynamic historical conception from progressivist models of history, treating the return to an imagined past as the future goal of history, one could characterize such an approach as "reactionary historicism." A relativist historical model lacking a clear progression of historical stages, such as that articulated by Michel Foucault, could be characterized as "successivist historicism."

The second set of terms is employed by Art Berman in his *Preface to Modernism* ([Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994]; see fn. 45 in Section II of "The Legitimation Crisis...Sections I-II") in order to distinguish different types of Modernism. Berman views most Modernisms as having traversed a series of four stages, although these stages do not form a necessary progression and are not strictly aligned with a timeline. Crucial to the argument of this section of my extended essay is Berman's placement of "Formalism" as the last stage in this sequence. Formalism flourished in most arts the mid-twentieth century and would obviously correspond to American post-WWII academic Modernism: "Formalism in art criticism is the belief that meaning can also be an objective property of an object. Meaning emerges from formal properties not themselves inherently meaningful; rather, their assemblage yields meaning" (p. 71).

In the standard Modernist model of the relationship between composer and public, the composer follows his or her artistic conscience in the creation of artworks, and the audience is expected to be interested in the artist's work and thought. The composer might explain the artwork to the audience, but, unlike craft traditions of earlier times, does not need to make adjustments in order to satisfy audience tastes. The composer-centered model has been central to progressively-oriented music over the last century; its validity can be clearly traced back to the artistic freedom achieved by Ludwig van Beethoven and the rich artistic legacy that resulted from it. Many of the composers of the nineteenth century now recognized as the most significant stretched audience expectations considerably in the service of their artistic ideals, expecting (or merely hoping) that the audience would eventually come around. This sort of gamble often succeeded, as the work of the most artistically daring composers often outlasted that of initially more-popular composers in the standard repertoire.

The composers of the Second Viennese School made a similar gamble, one even more audacious than those of its predecessors.<sup>2</sup> However, their post-tonal work, with the exception of that of Alban Berg, has not yet been rewarded by assumption into the standard concert repertoire of most orchestras and concert artists, despite the dedicated efforts of its supporters over a period of decades. This failure has led many to doubt the entire rationale of trusting a composer to prophesy his or her acceptance by future audiences; along with these doubts have arisen others, especially concerning the reliability of composers as interpreters of the meaning and significance of their own work.

Many of these doubts could be alleviated if one were to re-cast the debate in terms of the Postmodernist commitment to pluralism: "the audience" no longer has the fairly stable and restricted meaning it had in the late nineteenth century; instead, one should speak of "audiences."<sup>3</sup> In light

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<sup>2</sup> What was new here were both the time lag between creation and public acceptance and the nature of the promise contained in the prophecy. Both Robert Schumann and Richard Wagner prophesized their music's eventual public acceptance, but the predicted arrival of public recognition was to occur within the composer's lifetime (in Wagner's case this prediction was fulfilled); and the nature of the promise underlying this prediction had a poetic (Schumann) or socio-philosophical (Wagner) character. In the case of Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone method, the predicted public acceptance was pushed, partially by circumstances, into a distant future, and the primary means of assuring this recognition was the compulsion of musical logic. In a sense, the chief promise of the twelve-tone method was less an expressive vision than a demonstration of how much the method could accomplish. Initially it promised a revivification of Classical genres and forms, and later turned in both a more utopian and, eventually, more technocratic direction.

<sup>3</sup> Although Schoenberg often yearned for the favor of "the audience" and spoke in terms of a unified musical progress for all of music, in fact his musical project was most applicable to the novel sub-genre "new music" that arose in the twentieth century. Indeed, Schoenberg's project was instrumental in its formation, breaking up the near-monopoly of nineteenth-century public concert genres and tastes that are still the norm in Classical

of this expanded notion of "the audience," the project of the Second Viennese School has succeeded far beyond most expectations. After all, its music has been performed continuously throughout the century for the most varied audiences, has served as the model for various genres of contemporary music, and still maintains a fascination far greater than that of music more popular in its own time.

The fact must nevertheless be faced that a great deal of the most daring music of the last century has not found a stable place in the standard concert repertoire; in this sense, "the audience" of traditional concert music has unequivocally rejected progressive music, and the final judgment of the audience must be respected. Truisms of this sort are constantly repeated throughout the discourse of Classical music, in blogs, and in popular magazines and books. However, if one looks more closely at the facts, one discovers that such claims are more true in those countries that rely on a paying audience for the bulk of their financing, less true in those in which government funding picks up some of the shortfall; they are more true where leading musicians do not champion difficult music, and less true where they do. In short, one can conclude that these truisms are true everywhere except where they are not true.

The task of the defenders of these claims must therefore be to invalidate all concert systems that do not rely solely on a paying audience, and all validations of composers that do not place audience preferences first and foremost. A common tactic is to claim that validation by "elites" in some systems has skewed audience tastes, granting unearned legitimacy to "difficult" composers at the expense of others. By extension, one could view all of musical history as skewed by elite interests and tastes. A tint of conspiracy might thus endow the traditionally solemn task of recounting musical history with a thrilling *frisson*: perhaps hidden revelations lurk beneath even the smallest pebble of the historical edifice. With such potentials at hand for stoking populist resentment, few ages fail to produce a worthy spokesperson.

## **I. Overview**

### **A. Aims**

Richard Taruskin, often celebrated as one of the world's leading musicologists, has had a powerful influence over the last two decades in undermining a composer-centered approach to music, attempting to replace it with an audience-centered model. He has attained great influence in this debate owing to both his journalistic efforts and to his mammoth and widely

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music. In this light, Schoenberg's founding of the Society for Private Musical Performance could be considered a harbinger of pluralism in the sphere of composed concert music.

celebrated *Oxford History of Western Music*.<sup>4</sup> The extent of this influence can be measured not only in scholarly journals, but also in the large number of debates in the professional and semi-professional community that rely on Professor Taruskin's portrayal of twentieth-century musical history and assume, thanks to the "Oxford" imprimatur, that it is reliable.

Taruskin's *History* is clearly a remarkable achievement, and is undoubtedly one of the most significant music-historical projects of our time. The presence of a work of this scope, detail, and stylistic accomplishment is of great value to the entire intellectual community, whether or not one agrees with it in every particular. The criticisms expressed in this review are oriented primarily toward two issues.

First, it is reasonable to expect from any book series entitled "*The Oxford History*" work that lives up to a distinguished heritage of objective and reliable historical writing. The fact that this series is being marketed to universities as a standard scholarly resource increases these expectations. In the Introduction to each volume (unless otherwise noted, I will use the page numbers of the Introduction to Vol. 1), Taruskin explicitly promises great objectivity in his presentation. Unfortunately, this series, whose first volume is achieved with great distinction, is increasingly distorted by the author's ideological biases the closer it approaches to the present. In particular, both Taruskin's apparent belief that music was derailed by Romanticism and composer-centered aesthetic theories (which he views as reliant on the "poietic fallacy") and his evident distaste for what he casts as Romanticism's descendent, Modernism, lead to a master narrative of the last century's music skewed toward his desired outcome, namely the vanquishing of Modernism and the return of consonant, audience-friendly music to a position of near-complete dominance after long exile. In order to produce this outcome, a fair amount of myth-making is required.

The partisan nature of much of Taruskin's historical recounting offers occasion for writing of great stylistic energy, but it also tends to undercut one's trust in the work's reliability as scholarship. Had this series been entitled *Taruskin's History of Western Music* rather than *The Oxford History of Western Music*, it is unlikely that many would have objected to the presence of a historical recitation achieved with such verve. However, the marriage of the "Oxford" label with what Taruskin actually accomplished reflects well on neither.

Second, Taruskin's ideological commitments are not well served by his historical method, which appears not to have been sufficiently worked out to meet his aims. In particular, there seems to be an intrinsic conflict

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<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, c2005). All references will be to the five-volume 2010 edition; references will use the volume numbers of the history, and the individual titles of the volumes will not be named.

between his desire to tell a Baconian "true history" (which will be explained shortly), his attempts to translate past events into terms the present can easily understand (which could be considered a sort of "reader-response" method), and the organization of his narrative around central theses that require him to ignore evidence that conflicts with them. The result is a historical presentation that is often unreliable, arbitrary, and internally incoherent.

A central focus of critique in this review will be upon Taruskin's attempt to create a "paradigm shift" in historical writing: he aims to overturn the traditional focus upon musical works and their creators in favor of an "audience-response" model, in which listener responses form the central locus of musical meaning.

In Taruskin's view, authority configurations of the most varied sort have throughout history "willy-nilly" validated composers who reflected their interests,<sup>5</sup> granting a spurious legitimacy to these composers' music and interfering with what Taruskin apparently views as the only authentic path to legitimizing composers, namely through the direct response of listeners not misled by "elite" validations. By this route, Taruskin has attempted to re-legitimize once-popular composers such as such as Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Leos Janáček, and Benjamin Britten, who were once disdained by numerous Modernists, pitting them against icons of the Modernist tradition such as Johannes Brahms, Alban Berg, and Elliott Carter, whom he views as beneficiaries of elite and/or nationalist validation campaigns. The United States and what Taruskin believes are its values—popular support of "the audience" as opposed to elite control found in Europe, the *laissez-faire* system as opposed to state subsidization of artists in Europe, and so forth<sup>6</sup>—end up winning his history, with practically

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<sup>5</sup> This sort of claim is made, either directly or implicitly, about many of the great names of musical history, stretching from Josquin des Prez (Vol. 1, p. 549) to Elliott Carter, (Vol. 5, p. 301). In Josquin's case, humanist authors and commercial publishers found in Josquin an useful vehicle for their values and aims, as early-Romantic critics found in Beethoven a useful vehicle for different aims, and as post-WW II "elite" critics found in Elliott Carter a vehicle for yet other aims. In each case, Taruskin implies that another composer could have fulfilled each set of aims just as well. However, in Beethoven's case, precisely this implication, as will be seen below, leads Taruskin into clear contradictions; in other cases, it leads him to ignore or misrepresent evidence.

<sup>6</sup> Taruskin never lays all his cards on the table, but his comments concerning the Opéra de Paris on p. 206, Vol. 3, reveal what is likely his underlying attitude: opera in European countries was/is "considered a national asset and an instrument of national policy, while in twentieth- or twenty-first-century America it is considered a luxury product and is expected, there, to earn a profit." Taruskin constantly emphasizes the elite status of Classical music, opposing it to "anti-aristocratic, egalitarian ideals expressed in America's foundational documents," Vol. 2, p. 111. Although there are grains of truth in Taruskin's "egalitarian" claim—and it is not clear to which "foundational documents" Taruskin is referring—they are clearly overstated. There can be little doubt that political egalitarianism and economic levelling were not primary aims of the founding fathers. Indeed, the

all the discussion of the last half-century's music focused on American musicians and the American scene.

It must be admitted that the long-term centrality of popular genres and popular composers in history is a brute sociological fact too often ignored or dismissed by some historians and many Modernists.<sup>7</sup> Hard-line

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possibility that democracy might turn into mob rule—which was a standard figure of the historical tradition up until that time—was discussed extensively, and the Constitution restricted the franchise to male property owners.

Taruskin links the term "national policy" to European cultural support in a manner that is sufficiently amorphous to summon up any number of sinister connotations. One wonders, for instance which "national policy" Taruskin intends, as nations have many policies at different times, few of which have anything to do with music. Perhaps he intended to connote the more loaded term, "nationalist policy"; this would not, however, serve well to explain why Italian and even German operas have regularly been performed in France's leading opera houses.

However, Taruskin clearly ignores the fact that not all European countries currently have or in the recent past have had highly centralized policies for the arts. In a country such as Germany, for instance, most governmental support for the arts occurs at the *state* and *community* rather than at the *national* level, and various states and communities foster artistic scenes with distinctly different values and aims. This was even more the case in the nineteenth century than it is now.

It is regrettable that Taruskin does not mention the widespread political consensus in many European countries that ordinary citizens should have the right of access to culture—i.e., that access to cultural events should not be restricted to an elite class. Unfortunately, restricted access to live Classical performances is often a *de facto* norm in the United States, owing to high ticket prices and a shortage of permanent ensembles in many areas of the country. The constant battle American orchestras and Classical ensembles face in order to survive as compared to the far greater density of high-level cultural activity in some Western European countries is a direct consequence of the differing attitudes toward governmental support of the arts. Many would view European cultural policies as far more egalitarian in their results than their American kin, which, influenced by "laissez-faire" attitudes that have enjoyed great success over the last few decades, have increasingly left the funding for cultural institutions in the hands of small pools of wealthy donors.

<sup>7</sup> Taruskin demonstrates convincingly in Vol. 3, pp. 7-14, esp. 7-8, that the continued popularity of Rossini throughout the nineteenth century was underplayed or ignored by numerous twentieth-century music historians to the point that a central piece of information allowing us to understand the nineteenth century had disappeared from standard history textbooks. Blaming such errors on "Modernism" as a whole, however, is a more dubious proposition, as most of these historians would not have considered themselves Modernists. This is a fairly typical instance of Taruskin's amorphous conception of "Modernism." It should be obvious that even among those people who considered themselves "modern" in the early twentieth century, few would have claimed to be "Modernists."

On the other hand, some historians who Taruskin might credibly consider to be "Modernists" reached a conclusion similar to that appearing in Taruskin's *History*—i.e., concerning the devaluation by numerous twentieth-century historians of Rossini's significance for nineteenth-century music—decades before Taruskin did. For example, Carl Dahlhaus on p. 8 and 58-60 of his *Nineteenth-Century Music* (tr. J. Bradford Robinson [Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1989]; translation of *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts* [Wiesbaden, Adademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion,

Modernist composers almost unanimously put their faith in the intrinsic value of the music they favored, regardless of audience reactions to it. In contrast, Taruskin's belief appears to be that artworks have no intrinsic meaning or value; accepting this possibility would contradict his sociological credo, which is that societal forces and audience tastes determine the content of artworks. However, Taruskin often waffles on this point, as his connoisseur persona—in general his most engaging one—rarely can resist the opportunity to point out felicities in the music being discussed.<sup>8</sup> According to his credo, though, there is no reason to believe that these beauties are "really there," rather than being illusions we project onto artworks in order to validate them.

A thoroughgoing adherence to audience polling or experiments modeled on rational actor theory would apparently be the most theoretically defensible route for testing untainted audience tastes, if one could ever find audience members not tainted by education, training, influence of friends' tastes, or a thousand other factors. This, of course, is very likely impossible in the present, and certainly impossible for the past. Taruskin is certainly too intellectually sophisticated to follow this route.

Unfortunately, he has not managed to avoid the many contradictions into which shortcomings in his historical method have led him. It is crucial first to examine the basic premises of Taruskin's historical conception and method in order to better understand what he is aiming to do and how he intends to achieve it. Second, owing to the extraordinary breadth of Taruskin's project and to the interwoven nature of the problems it contains, it will be necessary to present a detailed review of each type of shortcoming. In the second part of this review, five "case studies" drawn from the *Oxford History*, each exemplifying troubling, and in some cases serious distortions of the historical record, will be discussed in detail.

## **B. Methodology**

In the Introduction appearing in each volume, Taruskin casts his efforts in the mould of Francis Bacon, attempting an exhaustive approach that, unlike other music histories which Taruskin considers mere surveys, makes great efforts "truly to explain why and how things happened as they did. This set

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1980]), makes essentially the same points that Taruskin does. Oddly enough, Taruskin has neglected to mention his debt to Dahlhaus in this regard.

<sup>8</sup> In Vol. 2, pp. 672-673, Taruskin dismisses Beethoven's most popular piece in his own lifetime, Wellington's Victory, as "orchestral claptrap," rather than following the theoretically consistent route of validating it precisely because Beethoven finally wrote in a manner that pleased his audience's tastes. Although this decision demonstrates solid musical judgment, it is also indicative of the theoretical shortcomings in Taruskin's historical method, forcing him to constantly bend or break his own rules.

of books is an attempt at a true history."<sup>9</sup> (Vol. 1, pp. XIII-XIV). This is indeed an admirable goal, to rid one's recounting of history of all error and

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<sup>9</sup> On the opening page of the Introduction to each volume, an extended citation from Bacon's *De Dignitate*... (1623) appears, which serves as a sort of credo for Taruskin's history. In it, Bacon proposes a long-term project, highly innovative in its own time, of compiling a universal history. Unfortunately, in the citation provided, one can discover only the most rudimentary elements of a coherent historical method as this notion is currently understood. Between Bacon's call for a universal history and the present time lie several centuries' worth of efforts by outstanding historians. These have not only generated a vast pool of reliable historical data, which was the main focus of the passage of *De Dignitate* that Taruskin cited, but have also—and more importantly—produced not only a large repertoire of methods for assessing the accuracy and relevance of this data and interpreting it in a reasonable manner, but also a professional culture dedicated to maintaining high standards throughout the historical discipline. In short, current historians possess an immensely greater fund of inherited knowledge and a far more sophisticated conception of historical method than Bacon could have imagined.

Thus, Taruskin's attempt to return to the Baconian origins of modern universal history runs the peril of bypassing, among other things, the methodological reliability and sophistication that are among the greatest virtues of much modern historical writing. For instance, Bacon remarks, "Above all things, I wish events to be coupled with their causes....in a historical way, not wasting time, after the manner of critics, in praise and blame, but simply narrating the fact historically, with but slight intermixture of private judgment." Most modern professional historians would instantly identify this as a species of circular reasoning, as Bacon wants the "historical" method to provide a "historical" narrative, without ever clarifying what "historical" in fact means (beyond, that is, the style of the recitation). If "historical" means a bare recital of events, then it cannot serve as a defensible method of connecting events with causes, as historical sequence does not in itself establish any causal chain; the belief that it does is a species of the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy.

What is more, Bacon's primary aim of connecting historical causes and effects, although central (when taken in the broadest sense) to the modern historical discipline, has also been the source of some of the most common and gravest historical errors over the last few centuries. There is a multitude of fairly plausible causes for any given event and fairly plausible consequences of it as well; in short, plausible causes and consequences can almost always be found. However, not all plausible causes and consequences are *actual* causes and consequences. Nor are they equally plausible, granted that one takes the effort to discover all the facts that are relevant to a conclusion capable of withstanding reasonable challenges rather than considering only those facts that support the conclusion one favors. Indeed, it is the rough plausibility of historical explanations cooked up by various political ideologies that has been the source of their greatest effectiveness and danger over the last few centuries.

Note that Taruskin's claim on p. XIII that the selection of topics was guided by the "dual requirements of causal explanation and technical explication" does not offer a credible response to the objections mentioned above. There is an endless supply of crackpot histories that also provide "causal explanation and technical explication"; some of these in fact appear highly credible, until one begins to analyze their explanations and explications in detail and compare them with the factual record.

In addition, although one would like to trust that Taruskin could provide a "historical" narration in Bacon's sense, i.e., without "praise and blame" and "with but slight intermixture of private judgment," in fact, as will be seen below, he does not escape his Introduction without condemning the work of a large number of his professional



to show what *really* happened and *why*. The temptation to resort to Leopold von Ranke's famous phrase, "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" is difficult to resist.<sup>10</sup> Many in the historical discipline, after decades of experience with the most recent *Methodenstreite* concerning the objective certitude and universal validity of any given historical method, might consider Taruskin's claims naïve.

On p. XX, Taruskin acknowledges the dangers of the "Baconian Fallacy," which seem especially great in light of the claims he is making to be telling "true history." Unfortunately, he does not offer a response that is even remotely adequate to meet these perils. For example, on p. XX Taruskin writes, "We all acknowledge now that our methods are grounded in and guided by theory, even if our theories are not consciously preformulated or explicitly enunciated."<sup>11</sup> But how can one develop and follow a coherent theory that has not yet been formulated? And why should the reader trust a theory that is never clearly enunciated by the author?<sup>12</sup>

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colleagues, past and present. What is more, his personal likes and dislikes form the guiding thread of the last portion of his history.

Toward the end of the Bacon citation, a method of sampling historical writings is suggested: "by tasting them here and there, and observing their argument, style, and method, the Literary Spirit of each age may be charmed as it were from the dead." This approach indeed seems to form the core of Taruskin's historical method and plays to his greatest strengths: he unquestionably possesses both great literary facility and superb skills in mimicry, and he has fashioned a highly entertaining and often dramatically gripping narrative. Regretably, the aim of charming past ages to life, however admirable on a literary level, does not correspond comfortably to the goal of providing the sort of reliable history that both Taruskin and the Oxford label promise. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish this methodological approach from that of high-quality historical fiction.

<sup>10</sup> This has often been mistranslated as "as it really was," resulting in claims that von Ranke's method was naïve; see Stephen Bann, "The Historian as Taxidermist: Ranke, Barante, Waterton," in E. S. Shaffer, ed., *Comparative Criticism: Volume 3: A Yearbook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 21-50. Note that Taruskin appears to be staking claim to the naïve method, aiming in one stroke to solve all the problems of historical method that have bedeviled the finest minds that have worked in the profession. Unfortunately, as we shall soon see, he ends up falling into the same traps that catch up every such attempt.

<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to understand who the "we" is intended to include. Is "we all" a universal statement—precisely the sort of statement Taruskin criticizes harshly throughout his *History*? If it is, then what is Taruskin to do with those musicologists who disagree with his statement, or who continue to practice the sort of history Taruskin has criticized immediately prior to making this statement? If it is not a universal statement, then does he by "we all" intend "all of us who are in the know...," i.e., a sub-group within the discipline of musicology that claims to possess a superior truth?

<sup>12</sup> David Hackett Fischer, in his *Historians' Fallacies* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1971, c1970)—a work cited approvingly in the Introduction of each volume of Taruskin's history—describes the "Baconian fallacy" as follows: "the idea that a historian can operate without the aid of preconceived questions, hypotheses, ideas, assumptions, theories, paradigms, postulates, prejudices, presumptions, or general presuppositions of any kind. He is supposed to go a-wandering in the dark forest of the past, gathering facts like

Taruskin notes that by the end of the epic, he was "sufficiently self-aware to recognize the kinship between the methods I had arrived at and those advocated in *Art Worlds*, a methodological conspectus by Howard Becker, a sociologist of art" (p. XX). Thus, Taruskin set forth to write an authoritative history of Western music with a yet-unformulated historical theory; by the end of his epic, he had begun to recognize in his efforts something resembling a methodology articulated by another author. This does not give the reader great confidence in the reliability of his historical method.<sup>13</sup>

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nuts and berries, until he has enough to make a general truth. Then he is to store up his general truths until he has the whole truth" (p. 4; Fischer does remark in a footnote that the method Bacon actually follows is not as naïve as that of numerous self-styled Baconians).

Taruskin apparently does not understand the gist of Fischer's criticism of "Baconism," as his claim on pp. XIII-XIV of Vol. 1 to be telling "true history" is a clear instance of Fischer's "Baconian fallacy," i.e., an attempt to get directly at the "whole truth" or the "true truth" without acknowledging core methodological problems faced by any historian. How can, for example, Taruskin *demonstrate*, and not simply *assert*, that his history is "true history," or that he can reliably explain "how things happened as they did?" For instance, it should be obvious that following Bacon's goal of "charming past ages to life" cannot lead to "true history," unless one were to admit that a novelist's or poet's dramatic recounting of history possesses a superior truth-value to that of a historian's factually-based account.

Everything here hinges on the meaning of "truth": is dramatic or emotional "truth" superior to intersubjective, factually-based truth? If so, what specific elements of one's own emotional reactions are claimed to be "true" for other humans, and what is the warrant for this claim?

Characteristically, on pp. XX-XXI Taruskin accuses other Anglo-American scholars of committing the "Baconian fallacy" for their failure to acknowledge the ideological context of the work of the renowned German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus. This is clearly an example of the "strawman" fallacy, as these scholars never claimed to be telling "true history" in Taruskin's manner. It is difficult to escape the impression that this accusation is a tactic to divert the reader from the fact that Taruskin has not presented a credible explanation of how he will manage to tell a Baconian "true history" without lapsing into the "Baconian fallacy."

Taruskin apparently believes he can avoid Fischer's charge of Baconian theoretical naïveté by claiming that his "method" is supported by an underlying theory, albeit one that is "not consciously preformulated or explicitly enunciated" (p. XX). An historical approach of this nature could reasonably be considered intuitive; because Taruskin is a highly skilled musicologist, one can easily grant that it is grounded in trained intuition. Nevertheless, the claim that Taruskin's trained intuition forms the basis of theory that is not "consciously formulated" would only be reasonable if he were working *within* an existent theoretical practice. Because he has explicitly rejected the standard approaches to history practiced by most of his colleagues, he cannot rely on the theoretical assumptions underlying them. Unfortunately, *asserting* that the pattern of one's hunches forms an underlying theory—even if the hunches are those of a highly accomplished musicologist—does not mean that anyone else will be *convinced* that they do.

<sup>13</sup> In Vol. 1, p. XV, Taruskin discusses the danger of inherited "master narratives" of music history, which he designates as outworn remnants of German romanticism. He does note that the history of these narratives is an unavoidable component of the history of music, which justifies his narrative strategy of "historicizing" them in his discussion of Romantic music. What is puzzling in all of this is that for the Romantic period, precisely

With his invocation of Bacon, Taruskin raises the hopes that he will at least attempt to consider examining the historical record in a neutral, objective manner, which he promises to do: "Inclusion and omission [of composers] imply no judgment of value here. I never asked myself whether this or that composition or musician was 'worth mentioning,' and I hope readers will agree that I have sought neither to advocate nor to denigrate what I did include" (p. XIV). This is in many respects an admirable goal; unfortunately, as will become evident, he has clearly not succeeded at this task. Taruskin makes his preferences and dislikes clear, and increasingly so the closer he gets to the present. For example, he has demonstrably omitted numerous living composers of whom he was informed but whom he did not believe worth mentioning, as their inclusion would apparently have marred the clarity of his meta-narrative, namely the coming end of musical literacy—in Taruskin's view, the defining feature of Western music—and with it, the end of Western music.<sup>14</sup>

Oddly enough, this meta-narrative has the same basic shape, culminating in the same death of art, as that promulgated by G. W. F. Hegel, whose philosophical-historical method Ranke opposed, and against whom Taruskin directs some of his sharpest criticism.<sup>15</sup> Ranke opposed the

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when the Hegelian theory of history had its greatest impact on musical developments, Taruskin chose the Adornian narrative strategy of defining the age by its dialectical antitheses, which block a Hegelian-type of "synthesis" (see fn. 30 below). Even stranger, in discussing the music since the 1970's, precisely the period in which the Marxist theory of history lost most of its credibility, Taruskin employs a Marxist-Hegelian narrative strategy, with the train of history driving the art form of Western music ever faster toward its end station (see the final section of this paper, "A.6. Setting: The Late Twentieth Century"). Both narrative strategies are anachronistic.

<sup>14</sup> "For it is the basic claim of this multivolumed narrative—its number-one postulate—that the literate tradition of Western music is coherent at least insofar as it has a completed shape. Its beginnings are known and explicable, and its end is now foreseeable (and also explicable)" (p. XV). Taruskin has neglected to consider the fact that neither foreseeing a significant future event nor explaining one's reason for the prediction necessarily carry any objective predictive value; if they did, then gamblers would be kings. However, predictions for significant historical changes are usually mistaken, and when they prove correct, this is usually more by chance than by design, as the exact timing and mechanism of the predicted event is rarely predictable. Taruskin cites Karl Popper approvingly in Vol. 3, but has apparently forgotten that the radical unpredictability of the future was a fundamental component of Popper's worldview. Popper would undoubtedly have criticized Taruskin's Marxist-style predictions in the harshest terms.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example Vol. 3, pp. 412-413. Taruskin, apparently forgetting his promise not to denigrate what he included (Vol. 1, p. XIV), one page later calls neo-Hegelian histories "shopworn heirlooms of German romanticism" (Vol. 1, p. XV). As will be discussed below, "Romanticism" is one of the core terms that in Taruskin's hands expands and contracts at will.

Taruskin's "end of art music" scenario is very likely more directly influenced by Arthur Danto's "end of art" thesis than by the Hegelian original, as it does not appear that Taruskin has read Hegel's writings with any seriousness, but has instead merely skimmed over English-language summaries. Taruskin may also have come across the poet Dana

employment of history as prophecy, whereas Taruskin apparently favors it.<sup>16</sup>

As the demotion of composers from their traditionally central role in the historical narrative of music is evidently one of Taruskin's primary aims throughout his history, one wishes that in the Introduction he had given a clear explanation of his motives for doing so. Instead, a crucial paragraph on p. XVII (first main paragraph) begins by criticizing other musicologists for their rejection of semiotic approaches and then swerves into a broader claim that other critics and musicologists are mistaken in their basic assumptions: "It is an old vice of criticism, and lately of scholarship, to assume that the meaning of artworks is fully vested in them by their creators, and is simply 'there' to be decoded by a specially gifted interpreter." He attributes this error to Theodor W. Adorno, although the attribution of this position to Adorno is demonstrably incorrect.<sup>17</sup> It is also

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Goia's articles predicting the end of print culture. His identification of Western art music with literacy may be influenced by Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1976, 1968c), which posits that a work's identity resides in its score; Goodman was a leading analytic philosopher, and his book had a strong influence on notation-centered attitudes of many composers in the 1960s and '70s. It is disappointing that Taruskin did not clarify the relationship of his theory to its long line of predecessors,

<sup>16</sup> Taruskin discusses the "master narratives" that he wishes to question in terms similar to those I use for idealistically-grounded artistic projects (see my article, "Musical Progress? New Music and Perils of Progressivist Historicism," fn. 1 above): they have a beginning, middle, and end. However, unlike Taruskin, I make no universalist claims for artistic projects. Although they may present moral imperatives, these are only binding on those who accept the premises of the project.

In contrast, Taruskin, for all the cautions he expresses concerning illicit universalism—"no [added emphasis] claim of universality can survive situation in intellectual history" (p. XV)—clearly allows his universal narrative concerning the end of the Western musical tradition to overrule those actual humans who are still working to maintain it. As the approaching end of Western art music is the central thesis of a narrative purporting to tell the entire history of Western art music, it is difficult to understand how Taruskin could claim that this narrative is not a metanarrative, binding on all historical actors, past and present.

However, Taruskin's stricture against universal claims is itself a universal claim. Because the content of his universal claim is that no universal statements can transcend their own context, his claim apparently ceased being valid the moment he finished pronouncing it. Thus, perhaps Western art music is safe—for the moment—from the most recent attempt to force it to a conclusion.

<sup>17</sup> To give but one example, in Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* (translated, edited, and with an introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006]), Adorno claims that Schoenberg was not aware of the wider implications of his twelve-tone method. It should be obvious to any serious Adornian scholar that Adorno viewed the social meaning of art as always exceeding authorial intent. Thus, Taruskin's claim that Adorno's method "grants oracular privilege to the creative genius and his prophets, the gifted interpreters" (p. XVII) is clearly unreliable.

Barely one page after guaranteeing the reader of his fastidiousness and objectivity, Taruskin follows this misstatement with an imputation that the cause of the "stunning rapidity" with which the work of the New Musicologists of the 1980s and 1990s has aged

of questionable relevance to his argument, considering that Adorno has had a negligible influence on Anglo-American musical discourse, yet Taruskin believes the vice he has specified is widespread in Anglo-American discourse. The conclusion he draws through a somewhat wobbly logic—i.e., drawing an affirmative conclusion from a negative premise—that not composers but rather the audience forms the locus of meaning for any artwork, turns out to be one of the central theses of

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is their reliance on the "preposterously overrated" T. W. Adorno (Vol. 1, XVII). He thus claims to invalidate, without offering any grounds beyond his subjective judgments, a wide swath of musicological work conducted by his peers in both America and Germany. Had he taken note of the unreliable manner in which many American New Musicologists have "used" Adorno for quite un-Adornian aims, in the process often neglecting or misrepresenting Adorno's key positions, he would at least have provided reasonable grounds for his judgment. But these grounds would not in themselves invalidate Adorno's aesthetic philosophy.

Taruskin does assert that all historical data, whether the author likes them or not, need to be reported ("it [i.e., Adorno's method] is part of history and, like everything else, deserving of report" [p. XVII]); one assumes that this will involve a fairly objective and accurate recounting, following Baconian principles. However, even though influential Adornian traditions of listening to and understanding music have existed in Europe for over a half-century, Taruskin has apparently decided that the Adornian tradition is "all wrong" and therefore unworthy of objective and accurate recounting. On p. XVII, for example, he pronounces—with a somewhat authoritarian flourish—Adorno's historical method to be "unacceptable"; the grounds are that it is "an authoritarian discourse and an asocial one" (as will become clear, "asocial" is a term that for Taruskin has various meanings—all bad—that shift about in response to his tactical aims).

Taruskin apparently believes that he is justified in offering such sweeping personal judgments of Adorno's method ("preposterously overrated," etc.), in the next paragraph stating that authorial judgments "have a place of honor in historical narratives," to which he appends the warning, "so long as they are not merely the historian's judgment." However, Taruskin does not offer any evidence that the subjectively-intensified judgements he has just made are shared by anyone else, and least of all by the rest of the musicological discipline; at any rate, his dismissal of the work of a broad swath of his colleagues has removed this court of appeal.

Similarly, two pages later (Vol. 1, p. XIX) Taruskin dismisses out of hand an influential distinction by Carl Dahlhaus between the *history* of art and the history of *art*, inexplicably converting what he at first asserts to be a "senseless *distinction* [added emphasis]" into a "forced *dichotomy* [added emphasis]." Reasonable grounds for Taruskin's claim that this distinction is senseless are not provided; the clear implication, though, is that whoever finds some meaning in this distinction is deluded. Such a chain of reasoning violates Taruskin's sociological credo, as it ignores empirical evidence that this distinction had some meaning for numerous musicians influenced by Dahlhaus. In addition, Taruskin violates the rules of logic by allowing a "distinction" (i.e., a difference at a surface level of entities sharing an identity at a deeper level) illicitly to drift in meaning into a "dichotomy" (i.e., a fundamental logical incompatibility: if one is true, the other cannot be true). Taruskin has also apparently forgotten that it was Dahlhaus himself who warned about the dangers of "bald 'either/or' typologies" (in *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*, Mary Whittall, trans. [London: Cambridge University Press, 1985], p. 98; translation of *Musikalischer Realismus: Zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* [Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1982]).

Taruskin's history. Unfortunately, in these pages explaining his aims and methodology he never does the reader the simple favor of presenting a defensible and internally coherent rationale for his claim that an author-centered viewpoint is a vice and an audience-centered viewpoint a virtue; nor does he explain how and why his viewpoint might overcome this assumed vice.

In keeping with this theory, Taruskin constantly challenges both composers' interpretations of their own works and the interpretations of critics and theorists who rely on what he casts as the "great man theory." In place of the traditional hermeneutical model, in which the central locus of meaning resides in the work of art, Taruskin, similarly to numerous Marxist theorists, places it in the audience.

This is a profoundly different perspective than offered by most musicologists, and it is an undertaking fraught with dangers. Traditional interpretational methods have avoided it for the obvious reason that without clear framing of the terms and an extremely rigorous and subtle methodology, the results of such approaches can end up being based on an arbitrary selection of samples, or can turn out to be so chaotic that they can only be strung together into a conclusion via vague generalizations.<sup>18</sup> Semiotic approaches, for which Taruskin offers great praise, are dogged by

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<sup>18</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, whose work Taruskin treats dismissively, gave adequate warning in his *Foundations of Music History* (trans. J. B. Robinson, [London: Cambridge University Press, 1983]; translation of *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* [Cologne: Musikverlag Hans Gerig, 1967]) of the dangers a project such as Taruskin's faces. On p. 27, for instance, he notes that "Once we cease merely criticising the autonomy principle and try to implement a counter-programme, the socio-historical approach proves to be fatally handicapped by the paucity and uniformity of the documents available to the history of reception. The concreteness claimed for this method pales into insignificance"; on p. 39 he remarks that "insisting that music ultimately resides in the 'communicative process' and not in the 'dead letter' will carry little or no weight when confronted with the disappointing discovery that the stereotyped evidence which historians of reception are forced to resort to from want of documents can hardly vie with the subtleties attainable by structural analysis of music. Moreover, reception has not always figured to an equal extent and with equal importance at all times and in all genres in that complex of phenomena which a given culture chooses to call 'music'."

Taruskin does offer numerous sensitive and insightful analyses of historical works, above all when he focuses on early music; however, he gives little indication of acknowledging how few of these insights belong to documented, contemporaneous reception history and how many are owing to extrapolation—often highly contestable—on the part of a brilliant critic-historian. Much of this extrapolation is anachronistic, as when past conflicts are framed in terms of contemporary sociology (for example, when Taruskin describes the early Romantics in a manner that makes it difficult to distinguish them from members of the 1960s counterculture [see Vol. 2, p. 641], or when he translates the conflicts between the avant-garde and Modernism into the terminology of "rebels" and "authorities"), when historical presentations are cast in terms of present-day academic disputes (as with the chapter on Josquin Des Prez), or when theoretical concepts from the late twentieth century are employed in order to explain earlier music.

a different set of problems: even if a rigorous methodology is employed, there is no guarantee that what the analyst discovers any phenomenon means is what the subject believes it means. In any given academic paper, the analyst's meaning will trump the subject's, but outside in the real world, the subject will probably continue understanding the phenomenon the way he or she always has. What is more, in Vol. 5 (pp. 511-514) Taruskin approvingly cites the philosopher Jerrold Levinson, whose work emphasizes the many different ways—most of them fragmentary—that listeners listen to and then make sense of music. If all of these different manners of listening are taken into account, then the problem of what music "means" is immensely more difficult, especially given that there may be little relationship between the "text" (i.e., the score and/or the performance) and what is perceived.

As but one example of the sampling problem, one must distinguish between "what music means" for a present-day musicologist, theorist, performer, composer, educated listener, casual listener, and so forth, at every sociological level; otherwise, one will arbitrarily be restricting membership of "the audience." However, even among a highly trained group such as musicologists, any given piece will mean something slightly different to each musicologist, and will possess different significance for each at the age of twenty than at sixty. If Taruskin cannot reliably describe what any given music "means" for any single living individual besides himself, he will certainly be unable to specify what it means for "the audience," whatever this term might mean in any given society. For example, even if he could specify what music "means" for a professional musician, this is likely to be of no use in deducing what it "means" for a member of the audience who cannot read music and cannot even carry a tune. Unfortunately, Taruskin does not give any indication of acknowledging these sorts of shortcomings in his theory, any single one of which would severely undermine its validity.

In addition, the traditional problem of ensuring the investigator's impartiality raises its head: how can Taruskin guarantee that his personal tastes, influenced by his elite education inculcating the universal value of Western music, as embodied in its master composers, will not influence the telling of history "true history"?<sup>19</sup> This is an especially pressing requirement in Taruskin's case, as he has established a reputation as a highly opinionated critic, whose actions have resulted in a series of often bitter controversies

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<sup>19</sup> In perusing Taruskin's writings, it is striking to see how often he employs tropes from the hermeneutical tradition that allow him to identify unacknowledged biases in others' historical interpretation, without, however, evincing any awareness that his own viewpoint might also be similarly biased. See, for example, his collection of essays, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially "The Pastness of the Present and the Presentness of the Past" and "The Modern Sound of Early Music."

with his professional peers over a period of decades.<sup>20</sup> Throughout his history, and despite his claims to the contrary, Taruskin's biases are clearly evident.

Be that as it may, even the most opinionated theorist might succeed in developing a set of procedures that will bracket out his or her personal opinions. One wonders what Taruskin's methodology is for determining the meaning of music for "the audience"; one wonders initially who "the audience" is, but Taruskin leaves this central term to grow, shrink, or alter at will.<sup>21</sup> He speaks briefly of semiotics (p. XVII), the study of discourse (p. XVI), and the controversial sociological methods of Pierre Bourdieu (p. XVI), but this is about all there is. There is not a trace in his bibliographies of his having done detailed empirical studies of meaning.

At this point, one would expect the unveiling of a momentous methodological innovation, but instead, at the end of the same paragraph, Taruskin blandly assures us that "The historian's trick is to shift the question from "What does it mean?" to "What has it meant?" That move is what

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<sup>20</sup> Although Taruskin's demeanor is uncharacteristically restrained in this history, signs of the acerbic persona known to his peers and victims do not fail to make an appearance. For example, he accuses Andrew Porter of "critical hysteria" for what appears to be a reasonably sane observation (Vol. V, p. 436), or, donning a psychiatrist's mantle, claims that a "negative pathology" (Vol. V, p. 94) was largely responsible for the Fluxus movement. One must assume that the latter statement is Taruskin's idiosyncratic conversion of a medical term whose standard meaning is "lack of disease" into a term whose meaning is "disease whose symptoms are excessive negativity." What precisely this is supposed to mean is anyone's guess.

<sup>21</sup> One clear example of the fallacy of equivocation appears in the chapter in Vol. 5 covering the Minimalists ("A Harmonious Avant-garde?"). The audience for Steve Reich's and Philip Glass's music is clearly distinct from "the audience" Taruskin has been talking about for last ca. fifteen hundred pages, namely the traditional Classical concert audience. Yet throughout this and the following chapters he writes about all the Minimalists as though they had succeeded in attracting "the audience." Taruskin points out that the traditional concert audience was scandalized when they first heard Reich's music (Vol. 5, pp. 378-379). He also quotes Philip Glass, before the successful premiere of *Einstein at the Beach*, as saying to an attendant of the Metropolitan Opera House, who had wondered "who these people are," "Well, you'd better find out who they are, because if this place expects to be running in twenty-five years, that's your audience out there" (pp. 388-389). Taruskin then indicates that this prediction has not borne fruit: there has been some crossover in audiences, but not a great deal. Obviously he is talking about two different audiences.

In his discussion of Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performance in Vol. 4, pp. 351-353, Taruskin portrays this attempt to protect new music from the disruptions that had occurred in earlier public concerts in vaguely conspiratorial language. It is clear that he believes that the audience at these private concerts was not "the audience." In fact, he appears to believe that only the larger public-concert audience consisted of real human beings; see p. 353, "Art [i.e., the art music performed at these private concerts] needed protection from people." It is curious how Taruskin came to the conclusion that the voluntary attendees of Schoenberg's concert series were not people.



transforms futile speculation and dogmatic polemic into historical illumination." (p. XVII).

This is an astonishing assertion. Without even attempting to solve the hornet's nest of problems concerning what music "means" to "the audience" in the present—when, at the least, one has living respondents who can serve as a reality check for the accuracy of one's conclusions—Taruskin simply shifts all these questions back in time. He thereby multiplies the original set of problems by all of the traditional problems that dog the historical profession—for example, judging the reliability of primary and secondary sources, establishing what percentage of the documents have survived out of the larger number of documents that once existed, assessing the representativeness of these documents, discovering which strata of society were literate enough to be able to leave documents behind, assessing the degree to which power and training structures influenced or even determined the content of documents, and so forth—exponentially expanding the number of problems his methodology must solve. If we do not know what any given music "means" now—and whatever meaning is asserted is almost certain to generate a counter-interpretation—then we certainly know even less about what it meant to actual people in the past.<sup>22</sup>

A host of difficulties predictably arise from Taruskin's neglect to establish a reliable methodology. The primary impression one gets is that of an extraordinarily well-read musicologist with a brilliant style and a gift for mimesis improvising his way through the historical record. Underneath the confident facade, though, one finds not only a distressing degree of

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<sup>22</sup> On p. XVIII, Taruskin emphasizes his reliance on "*Statements and actions* in response to real or perceived conditions: these are the essential facts of human history." However, not all past responses to artworks resulted in statements and actions that ended up in the historical record. Practically no reliable documentary record of the responses to music of musically non-literate commoners exist for a period of thousands of years, yet this group constituted the vast majority of human beings. In addition, a vast majority of the actions of commoners throughout history are unrecorded. Thus, Taruskin's sample of evidence for "what it meant" is already heavily skewed toward the elites. Yet even among these records of elite responses, only a fraction that were ever written yet survive, and often for the most arbitrary reasons: a war here, a fire there are sufficient to wipe out a vast store of historical records. Taruskin further undercuts the trust of the reader when he equates discourse about music—i.e., the evidentiary basis of his entire undertaking—with "buzz" or "spin" (p. XVI), i.e., with conscious attempts to manipulate responses in order to increase sales. This is surely a model case of a historian's conspiratorial leanings unwittingly undermining a central rationale of his entire enterprise.

What is more, why should all responses to "perceived conditions" serve as the "essential facts" of human history? Are all racists' perceptions now to be treated as "essential facts?" Perhaps Taruskin has forgotten David Hackett Fischer's stricture that historians should deal with facts, which are "true descriptive statements about past events" (see fn. 12 above; Fischer, p. xv).

arbitrariness, but also a tendency to engage in a conspiratorially-tinged campaign against what he styles as the "elites" of history.

At times his methodology appears traditionally empirical and neutral, in that he calmly sifts through various types of evidence and reaches provisional conclusions, refusing to favor or condemn the historical figures under discussion; this is what he had promised the reader in his Introduction. But at other times, and increasingly in the last three volumes, when one of his favored or deplored composers is the focus of discussion, he throws objectivity to the winds, tilting the evidence against the "bad guy" and swerving into a "great man" methodology he had programmatically abjured in support of his hero.<sup>23</sup> As soon as "elites" are mentioned, a sort of Foucauldian "paranoid theory of power" often takes over;<sup>24</sup> at these times his historical model becomes relativist, resembling Foucault's successivist historicism, in which each age is dominated by certain power configurations and discursive formations that, for reasons no one can predict, mysteriously shift, forming a new *episteme*. At other times his method appears populist-leftist, and nearly Marxist, as when he quotes the Marxist historian Arnold Hauser approvingly (at the end of Vol. 2, pp. 736-737), or when he hints that "social harmony" should trump individual rights and artistic freedom (Vol. 3, pp. 742-743, Vol. 4, pp. 352-353, and Vol. 5, pp. 380-382 and p. 508).<sup>25</sup> Throughout Vol. 5, Taruskin constantly

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<sup>23</sup> This includes highly tendentious presentations of Benjamin Britten's work in relationship to Elliott Carter's, and Tchaikovsky's in relation to Brahms's, as will be seen in the case studies found in Part 2 of this review.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Lentricchia, *Ariel and the Police: Michel Foucault, William James, Wallace Stevens* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 31; cited in Robert M. Strozier, *Foucault, Subjectivity, and Identity: Historical Constructions of Subject and Self* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), pp. 57-59.

In Taruskin, see, for example, Vol. 2, pp. 670 ff., esp. 677-678 and 736-739; or in Vol. 5, the chapter on Postmodernism, "After Everything."

<sup>25</sup> In his discussion of the changed situation after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and clearly desiring to undermine the artistic autonomy of composers that was safeguarded by a fear of a recurrence of Zhdanovism, in Vol. 5, p. 508, Taruskin questions whether it is "necessary for artists to maintain belief in 'the irreconcilable nature of the esthetic and the social worlds,' to quote the German cultural critic Jürgen Habermas."

Although this show of philosophical erudition is undoubtedly bold, it is also foolhardy. Habermas over the last half-century has worked out a sophisticated theory of society that grapples with the problems that Taruskin has apparently not yet worked through in a coherent manner. For example, one primary purpose of the distinction of aesthetic and social worlds in Habermas's philosophical system is to prevent the swallowing-up of all spheres into a universalized subject, i.e., society conceived as a subjective unity; Habermas views this as one of the most serious shortcomings in the Hegelian and Marxist tradition. One would think that Taruskin would concur, as he repeatedly warns (albeit via the "fallacy of many questions" and the "furtive fallacy" [David Hackett Fischer, pp. 8-12 and 74-78]) of the dangers of universalism (e.g., Taruskin, Vol. 2, p. 739, etc.). This is precisely why Habermas insisted decades ago on the necessity of distinguishing the esthetic and social worlds. Distinguishing them is not

bewails the damage done to society by the compositional autonomy he attributes to Romanticism, chastising, in a manner that would have warmed the heart of Stalinists like Zhdanov, composers besotted with "Romanticism" for following their own consciences and not conforming to the dictates of "the audience." At other times his history appears Postmodern, emphasizing historical discontinuities, simultaneous appearances of what are traditionally considered more "retrogressive" and "advanced" styles,<sup>26</sup> and the like. However, the closer he gets to the present, the more insistently his method turns progressivist historicist. By the end of the book he has apparently turned Hegelian, predicting the end of the art form "as we know it" and picking winners in a new, postliterate era.<sup>27</sup>

This last maneuver is especially odd, as the one historical theory that is abused perhaps more than any other is Hegel's.<sup>28</sup> It is one thing to stylistically imitate prominent philosophical theories of an era, as Taruskin does in Vol. 3 (esp. pp. 7-8), casting Beethoven and Gioachino Rossini as "Thesis" and "Antithesis"—i.e., the unreliable translation of Hegel's technical terms *an-sich* [in-itself] and *für-sich* [for-itself]<sup>29</sup>—in a "Hegelian" dialectical pair.<sup>30</sup> But it is unfathomable that in a Postmodern age, in which

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equivalent to dichotomizing them, as Taruskin seems to believe. But collapsing them is a far greater danger. Habermas's model, for example, provides grounds for warning against the "scientization" of the aesthetic world, which Taruskin also criticizes in his discussion of the Princetonian serialists (in Vol. 5, "The Apex"). However, Taruskin seems content with allowing the aesthetic world to be swallowed up into the social world.

Unfortunately, Taruskin simply has not worked out a coherent rationale for his aims, and as a result repeatedly ends up lurching about in contradictions. He implicitly endorses utopian aesthetic-social goals such as "social harmony" (Vol. 5, pp. 380-383) that one supposes would be imposed on all in a society, i.e., universally. Yet he consistently emphasizes the dangers of universalism and utopianism. However, he also castigates society for not respecting what he appears to view as the natural rights of marginalized groups (e.g., Vol. 2, p. 739), i.e., rights assumed to be universally valid.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the discussion arising from the example of the German Minnesinger Oswald von Wolkenstein, Vol. 1, pp. 142-145. Taruskin would very likely deny that he is a Postmodernist; at any rate, his attempts to provide a historical-philosophical rationale for this movement are cursory and barely credible; see, for example, Vol. 5, pp. 413-414 and pp. 471-2.

<sup>27</sup> For example, he dismisses New Complexity as a "rear-guard action" (Vol. 5, pp. 476), which would only make sense if history were moving forward on a single track; on pp. 508-511 he is openly predicting the future outcomes.

<sup>28</sup> Although Hegel's *History* is likely the weakest link in his philosophical system, it is doubtful that any expert in Hegelian philosophy would consider Taruskin's attempt to demolish Hegel's theory of history (in Vol. 3, pp. 412-415) anything better than dilettantish. It was very likely cobbled together second-hand from Karl Popper's writings.

<sup>29</sup> These mistranslations have a long tradition in the sort of second-hand English-language commentaries on Hegel that appear to be the primary basis of Taruskin's information about the philosopher.

<sup>30</sup> This is a generous reading of Taruskin's narrative tactic, as one cannot play the Hegelian game without an immanently derived "Synthesis"—an *an-und-für-sich* [in- and for-itself]—which is never provided. Here Taruskin is very likely mimicking Adorno's

we are assumed to live, a Hegelian philosophy is used to predict the end of the history of the art form of music.<sup>31</sup> In addition, if a Postmodernist theory, such as Taruskin's often appears to be, denies historical progress and a necessary chain of historical events, how can it predict the next event in a historical line?<sup>32</sup>

One could describe Taruskin's overall approach as "eclectic" and leave it at that. However, a core promise that Taruskin has made is the Baconian pledge to tell it "as it actually was," something which he has not come close to achieving. Instead, one sees the past through the present's—and a flamboyant presenter's—eyes, with copious use of theories and articles (most of them uncited<sup>33</sup>) with which Taruskin has come into

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immanent critique of Hegelian dialectics. In his *Philosophy of New Music* (translated and edited by Robert Hullot-Kentor [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006]), Adorno employs Walter Benjamin's method of portraying an artistic period via its dialectical extremes, but adds a touch of pathos by presenting the "synthesis"—the goal of Marxist progressivist historicism—as being blocked. Taruskin mimics Adorno by claiming in Vol. 3 that "Wagner's ironically counter-Hegelian legacy was the intensification of antitheses and the prevention of synthesis" (p. 567); Taruskin also employs this strategem in his Tchaikovsky-Brahms (Vol. 4) and Britten-Carter (Vol. 5, "Standoff") polarities. In resorting to these devices, he is apparently exempting himself from his criticism of "pseudo-dialectical 'method'" and the "Great Either/Or" on p. XIX of Vol. 1.

<sup>31</sup> After having predicted the end of Western music (i.e., the central thesis of his entire narrative) for several hundred pages, Taruskin covers his bets on p. 528, the final page of his epic, with "The future is anyone's guess." He has, however, stage-managed the closing tableau, allowing only a "thinning faction of traditional Modernists" (note that the Modernists form a "faction," implying a somewhat militant, self-enclosed group), while intentionally excluding a vastly larger group of younger, progressively-minded composers who have been purposely excluded from his history.

There are obvious tactical advantages to Taruskin's ending the history of Western music with the conclusion of his epic: if a historian declares the art form finished, then everything within it becomes historical. The complexities of discovering music's conflicting meanings for its living audiences can be cleared away in a stroke if the historian is given free rein to interpret "what it all meant," with no composers or audiences to get in the way. Taruskin is not even averse to putting words into dead composers' mouths (see Vol. 5, p. 265, where he practices this tactic upon Benjamin Britten).

<sup>32</sup> Note that on pp. 411-414 and 454-455 of Vol. 5, Taruskin describes a spreading awareness of a fundamental change of reality signalling the arrival of Postmodernism, something that is difficult to distinguish from a Marxist-style progressivist historicist drama (see fn. 1 above). Taruskin then forecasts a new stage beyond Postmodernism (for example, on pp. 509-510: "When a majority of composers work that way, the postliterate age will have arrived...There has already been much movement in this direction"), and one supposes that everyone will be forced to jump on the moving train of history or be left behind. Taruskin proclaims the future, and owing to the prestige of both his own academic institution and the university press that publishes his *History*—which is now being offered to universities online for a subscription fee, packaged as an objective scholarly resource—he is advantageously placed to influence the future. Taruskin has predicted the death of music as a literate art form, and he apparently sees it as his mission to help kill it.

<sup>33</sup> Taruskin's entire enterprise rests upon a vast amount of research conducted by other scholars over the last century. He has cited only a fraction of this research and only

contact over a busy scholarly career. Thus, for example, one sees the work of theorist Leonard Meyer pressed into use to explain debates concerning nineteenth-century absolute music (for example, Vol. 3, p. 471), although nineteenth-century listeners would not have been privy to this knowledge. Such contributions help to illuminate certain aspects of nineteenth-century debates from a point of view influenced by the contemporary academic (i.e., "elite") theoretical discourse, but do not explain "what it meant" to actual participants in these debates. A discussion of the song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" drops into an explanation of Gregorian chant (Vol. 1, pp. 18-20), even though such a juxtaposition would have been baffling to monks in the Dark Ages.<sup>34</sup> The music and career of Josquin des Prez are read almost entirely through the lenses of current academic debates oriented toward "de-Beethovenizing" Josquin.<sup>35</sup> This leads Taruskin into a somewhat bizarre episode in which he not only questions the motivation of Renaissance humanists for treating Josquin's works, after his death, as compositional models (Vol. 1, 547-552), but also presents Josquin's extraordinary reputation during his own lifetime as nearly entirely a result of marketing tactics and flukes of chance.<sup>36</sup>

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intermittently acknowledges his significant debts to his predecessors and colleagues. Regretably, he rarely lets an opportunity pass to chastise others in his profession for their shortcomings.

<sup>34</sup> Nor is this example especially relevant to the discussion of Gregorian chant, first because there is a contemporaneous authoritative text for the baseball song, whereas there is none for most Gregorian chants, and second because the types of alterations found in different versions of any given Gregorian chant (addition of melismas and tropes, alteration of intervals while retaining overall shape, and so forth) are different from those found in most current renditions of the baseball song.

<sup>35</sup> That is, to combat the "Beethovenized" portrait of Josquin maintained by those influenced by the eminent musicologist Edward Lowinsky; see Vol. 1, pp. 547-548 and 577-580.

<sup>36</sup> Taruskin does present a sensitive analysis of Josquin's *Ave maria* and emphasizes as axiomatic the "inherent quality" (p. 547) of Josquin's music, but he also indicates both that Josquin was one of many fine composers of his time and that a "prestige game" was responsible for his enshrinement as a "Classic." On pp. 547-555, Taruskin focuses on the posthumous reputation of Josquin, claiming on pp. 549 that he "willy-nilly" became a beneficiary of humanist values ("a distinction entirely unasked-for and unmerited," p. 552) that were fully formed only after his death. However, on pp. 559-560, while discussing the high reputation that Josquin held in the musical establishment of Ercole d'Este I, Duke of Ferrara, Taruskin asserts that "The Josquin legend had been born, and was already doing its historical work." This gives the clear impression that the prestige Josquin had attained in this circle can be reduced to a sort of marketing ploy, with Josquin being "the chief protagonist and beneficiary of the nascent 'music biz,' the dawn of commercial music printing" (p. 549). Duke Ercole's patronage of Josquin is downgraded from "lofty impulses" and high artistic aims attributed to him by earlier historians; Taruskin asserts that the Duke was probably not acting on these impulses, but rather on the "lure of conspicuous consumption—the same impulse that motivates the purchase of expensive designer jeans or luxury cars" (p. 559-560).

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Thus, not only does Taruskin treat posthumous validations of Josquin's music as untrustworthy, having little or no relationship to qualities inherent in the music (there is strong historical evidence for such an assertion in some, but certainly not all cases), but he also treats contemporaneous validations with the same suspicion. Taruskin's presentation gives little indication that *some* posthumous and some contemporaneous validations were indeed based on deep knowledge of and appreciation for Josquin's music, or that the high quality and expressivity of this music might have merited its posthumous influence. Indeed, one wonders whether any historical agent of the period could meet the standards for reliability and merit Taruskin has set, as he has apparently found a means of undermining the "statements and actions" of the real human beings of the period who knew Josquin's music. Yet these were supposed to provide the core of his "true history."

Note that Taruskin relies only on circumstantial evidence for his reductionist suggestion that Duke Ercole viewed the creation of an outstanding chapel in the same manner that wealthy people now view the purchase of designer jeans: he provides a quotation from a member of the Duke's court that he would have a "better chapel" than other rulers if he hired Josquin, and he cites two speculations from Lewis Lockwood upon the glory that would likely accrue to the Duke, at that historical juncture, were he to hire Josquin. Is this a credible historical explanation? Does it provide any illumination of Duke Ercole's "true" motives? Can the Renaissance-era creation (via astute "talent hunting" of leading singers and composers) and maintenance of an extraordinary chapel over an extended period of time literally be understood as "the same" as the consumption of consumer goods in our time? Or is this not in fact an example of the fallacy of "weak analogy," in which a superficial similarity between two situations is treated as the basis for asserting that they are identical or very nearly so? Is this analogy not anachronistic, and even ethnocentric? Taruskin spends the bulk of his chapter on Josquin unravelling the "mythology" that has accrued to Josquin's name, showing how various historians have gone astray as a result, yet here he appears to be falling into a counter-mythology. At any rate, this historical explanation does not explain very much, and it is likely to be swiftly overturned, if indeed it is treated with any seriousness.

Taruskin dances around more obvious reasons for Josquin's high reputation, namely the extraordinary ambition and accomplishment of his musical works. If one accepts, at least on heuristic grounds, the notion that outstanding artistic achievement of great individuality might transcend its initial context, one has a means of explaining, on grounds not reducible to social politics, the high reputation Josquin's works gained during his lifetime, which might also indicate both the durability of interest in his music and its suitability for serving at a later time as an ideal of humanist values (in Vols. 2 and 3, Taruskin makes striking observations in this direction concerning certain works by Mozart and Beethoven). Significantly, Taruskin avoids detailed discussion of the musical qualities of a clearly extraordinary work such as Josquin's *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales*. He chooses instead to treat the work reductively, focusing on the ostentatious qualities of Josquin's mass and implying that these were part and parcel of a prestige game (Vol. 1, pp. 499-500).

In light of Taruskin's thoroughgoing suspicion of the notion of an artwork possessing intrinsic meaning, it is surprising to find him appealing to the "inherent quality" (p. 547) of Josquin's music. Especially over the last few centuries, inherent artistic quality has been far more difficult to demonstrate than inherent meaning, which can at least initially be anchored (depending on the theory one follows) on generic/stylistic norms or on the testimony of the composer or contemporaneous critics and audiences. However, if "inherent artistic quality" is to be measured by generic norms or contemporaneous critical or audience judgments—certainly one cannot trust the composer's testimony here—then one is at a loss to explain why critics and audiences have usually found the favorites of a

On the purely musical level, one gets the privilege of following a brilliant musician employing his intuition in the analysis of the paradigmatic works he discusses, a spectacle that often offers great rewards. Predictably, his intuition seems to hit the mark most often in the traditional music he knows best, and above all when he is discussing early music, the focus of his training. Just as predictably, his intuition tends to go astray when discussing post-WW II non-tonal music. Although these analyses are in many cases technically solid, he evinces a depressing incapacity for distinguishing works of high ambition, achievement, and quality from less-accomplished works,<sup>37</sup> treating them all more or less as symptoms of the approaching death of Modernism, one of the central story lines in the latter half of his history.

However this may be, the model of the brilliant interpreter decoding musical works is in fact precisely what Taruskin criticizes in his Introduction (p. XVII). There, Taruskin characterizes as a "vice" the model of the gifted interpreter decoding meaning fully vested in the work of art by the composer. But what Taruskin practices is the interpretation of meanings the critic *asserts* to be vested in the work by "the audience," by social history, by the weather, or by who knows what, as he is determined to allow the creative author little room to determine the content of his or her creations. In Taruskin's ideology, the ultimate meaning of any artwork is social; but he, the critic, gets to decide what is social and what not.

Some of these problems might have been avoided had Taruskin investigated more thoroughly hermeneutical methodologies that acknowledge the crucial role of distancing in any historical or aesthetic analysis. These need not place all meaning in the author's intention; in Paul Ricoeur's theory, for example, meaning is situated *between* the text and the reader.<sup>38</sup> However, Taruskin appears oblivious to the consequences of his methodological shortcomings. One of the catastrophic decisions for this project, which, given his extraordinary abilities, could have been a significant intellectual event, was Taruskin's failure to develop a rigorous and defensible methodology adequate to the task at hand. It is difficult to trust in the judgment of an author clearly unable to neutralize his own

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previous generation to be threadbare and dull, even when the original meaning remains crystal clear. If instead "inherent quality" is a sort of projection from our own time and cultural situation, adopted in order to explain the exceptional durability of certain artworks, then it clearly cannot be inherent. It should be obvious that the very notion of inherent quality requires that one accept the possibility that there exist standards of quality that transcend their own cultural context. However, if one accepts the "truth" of reductionist relativism, one must surrender all claims to inherence.

<sup>37</sup> This is especially true of his coverage of composers who gained prominence just after WW II, such as John Cage, Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, and especially Karlheinz Stockhausen.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982, c1981).

biases and unable to present a coherent rationale for specifying which elements of reception history are significant and why.<sup>39</sup>

### C. Fallacies

In order to provide at least the appearance of methodological rigor, Taruskin specifies a minor army of "fallacies" that should be avoided. These include the essentialist fallacy, the well-known pathetic fallacy, the organic fallacy, the genetic fallacy, the biographical fallacy, and the poietic fallacy, Taruskin's invention. Some of these are derived from David Hackett Fischer's *Historian's Fallacies*,<sup>40</sup> which Taruskin cites in the Introduction to each volume. Their spirit, however, is ultimately derived from the censorious habits of the New Critics, who made great use of the pathetic and intentional fallacies with the aim of reforming readers of literature,<sup>41</sup> precisely the sort of "elite" guidance that Taruskin abhors. Modernist critics such as I. A. Richards delighted in exposing the sentimental vices of young readers (many attributable, in a trope often imitated by Taruskin, to "Romanticism"),<sup>42</sup> and the grade-school ring was effective in warning the naïve to avoid such behavior.

Taruskin is therefore caught in a conflict, one which he does not acknowledge: although he usually accuses his academic peers of committing these "fallacies," the overwhelming majority of "sinners" are ordinary music consumers. If these are indeed fallacies, and "the audience" is employing them in order to make sense of the music they enjoy, then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Taruskin the elite culture critic is looking down on his uneducated audience and insisting that they reform themselves. On the other hand, his listener-centered aesthetic rests on the authenticity of audience responses: are these most authentic in their unreformed state, or are they only to be allowed after the elite culture critic has trained audiences not to commit any fallacies?<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Active and intelligent editorship could also have saved this enterprise. It is astonishing that a firm with the reputation and resources of Oxford University Press did not provide the sort of critical feedback that might have mitigated the most severe conceptual, factual, and logical *faux pas*.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit. (see fn. 12 above).

<sup>41</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley's "intentional fallacy" is paradigmatic of this sort of attempt to treat a rival theory as a schoolboy error; see Wimsatt, W.K., and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," In W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), pp. 3–18.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1929).

<sup>43</sup> One could claim that audience tastes have been tainted by Romanticism or some other thought crime, but a sociological method that employs this tactic carelessly swiftly descends into incoherence. A simple test of the validity of such notions is that of providing at least one example of "audience tastes" not influenced by any ideology. What passionate,



The main methodological problem with Taruskin's fallacies is that they are not fallacies in the same sense that standard logical fallacies are. His "poietic fallacy," for instance—"the assumption that all it takes to account for the nature of an artwork is the maker's intention, or—in a more refined version—the inherent (or immanent) characteristics of the object that the maker has made"<sup>44</sup> (Vol. 2, p. 13)—is not a fallacy in the same sense that a false dichotomy, equivocation, or an *ad hominem* argument is. The latter are clear violations of the standards of good argumentation, mistakenly or deceptively presenting two compatible positions as though they were logically incompatible, trying to use a word in two ways at the same time, or introducing irrelevant information as a means of clinching an argument. But the "poietic fallacy" commits no logical error or error of method *per se*; rather, it is a violation of acceptable discursive standards for making sense of art, in the eyes of the person uttering it. If it were a fallacy, then all writers would agree that it violates some basic rule of argument or historical method. But Taruskin admits on p. 13 of Vol. 2 that the poietic model is appropriate in some contexts; thus, it is not a fallacy.

Quite a few eminent musicians would argue that its use is appropriate in far more cases than Taruskin allows. Most would view it as especially appropriate for studying the music of the last two centuries, which is precisely when Taruskin believes it has wreaked its greatest harm. Certainly many of the historical agents who are the focus of the last three

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long-term follower of Classical music has never heard of the name "Beethoven," has never read a single CD jacket, article, or book, has never heard a single educational broadcast in which composers were discussed, and whose tastes have not been influenced at all by the range of music available in concerts and recordings? If no such extraordinary individual can be produced, then the entire notion of "uncorrupted" audience tastes must collapse.

<sup>44</sup> Taruskin's formulation is obviously an example of the "strawman" fallacy, as no theory of interpretation of any sophistication has ever assumed that the author's intention alone is sufficient to account for all of the characteristics of a significant work of art. Taruskin has also conjoined two contradictory conceptions in his definition. Most adherents of the New Criticism, for instance, would view the first definition, focused on the maker's intention, as committing the dreaded "intentional fallacy," whereas the second, focused on the object made by the artist, would offer a reasonable starting point for criticism.

One suspects that a primary reason for the central role that the "poietic fallacy" plays in Taruskin's history is that Carl Dahlhaus—whose "inexplicable prestige" (p. XIX) Taruskin contests—on page 4 of his *Foundations of Music History* (op. cit.) insists that "the material of music history resides not in *praxis*, or social action, but in *poiesis*, the creation of forms." Taruskin aims to situate *praxis* above *poiesis*, and to this end he has risked the gambit of declaring the primary concern of most musicologists a "fallacy."

In view of both the central role that the "poietic fallacy" plays in Taruskin's epic and the number of instances in which he appears to be borrowing from Dahlhaus, imitating him (intentionally or not), or otherwise responding to his assertions (see, for example, pp. 8-9, 12-13, 17, 26-28, 34, 39, 47-48, and 65 from Dahlhaus's *Foundations* for passages that might have influenced Taruskin, even if with results contrary to those that Dahlhaus intended) it is disappointing that Taruskin did not acknowledge the degree to which his *History* appears to be a riposte to Dahlhaus's body of historical work.

volumes of Taruskin's history fell for this "fallacy" as well, leaving Taruskin in the odd position of invalidating the views of the main actors from the historical periods he is supposed to be explaining in an objective, Baconian manner.

There are clear tactical advantages to catching rival methodologies up in "fallacies," an accusation of which Taruskin makes liberal use. However, Taruskin borrows the authority of traditional Logic without always playing by its rules. Apparently these fallacies are only fallacies when other historians commit them; when Taruskin employs them, they cease being fallacies. For example, Taruskin skewers others' employment of the biographical fallacy, but employs it himself when convenient.<sup>45</sup> He abhors the essentialist fallacy, but then treats German culture as essentially ethnocentric and nationalistic (see, for example, Vol. 3, pp. 158-162). So many different kinds of creative responses are attributed to the Cold War that one begins to sense essentialism creeping into Taruskin's portrayal of this period: in the Cold War era, all humans were apparently suffering from "Cold-War-ism."<sup>46</sup> He abhors the genetic fallacy, but not only does he consistently commit it, he intensifies it via an idiosyncratic Taruskinian variant that might be labeled the "genetic fallacy abusive": not only do the origins of any widely-shared ideational structure determine its essence for all later times, but the origins are abhorrent, tarring all future times influenced by them.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For example, he interprets *Peter Grimes* through the lenses of Britten's position as a homosexual in mid-twentieth century England, thereby committing the biographical fallacy, and perhaps the intentional fallacy as well; see Vol. 5, pp 245-248, as well as the discussion of Britten's later work that follows in the same chapter.

<sup>46</sup> See especially the opening chapters of Vol. 5. Taruskin repeatedly stresses the anxiety in this period, but was everyone anxious at all times? He also mentions that Soviet composers retreated to themes of childhood in response to this anxiety (p. 12), but is this because they were anxious about the Cold War; might there not be simpler and more likely explanations? In light of the fact that Taruskin has just described Zhdanov's 1948 attack on major Soviet composers (pp. 10-11), requiring that they "shun the use of modernistic techniques that shut out nonprofessional listeners" and "make liberal use of folklore," the relative safety of childhood themes makes much more sense as an external cause than the essentialist one of generalized anxiety. One must note that in the extended discussion of David Del Tredici's *Final Alice* from 1975 (pp. 442-445), there is no longer any mention of "Cold War-ism" as a cause for Tredici's obsession with childhood themes.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Taruskin assumes that "Romanticism," which he clearly associates with German culture and blames for a wide range of ills that music has suffered over the last two centuries, has an essential, core meaning rooted in an attitude toward life (see, for example, Vol. 2, p. 641). However, he neglects to show us the changing usages of the term at different times and in different societies. For example, "Romantic" in 1800 meant something different to those who employed the term than it did in 1830, or 1880, or 1920. It often appears in Taruskin's hands that everything that happened in German culture in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century is attributable to "Romanticism," although he often betrays a weak grasp of the actual positions of those who were considered "Romantics" and those opposed to them. In this regard, Taruskin could be accused of

## D. Terminology

Although Taruskin is very hard on other historians for their alleged transgressions of proper historical method, he is very easy on himself when it comes to his imprecision in defining terms and his unwillingness to stick with the definitions he has chosen. Central terms such as "Romantic," "Modernist," and "avant-garde," whose historical meanings are already manifold, are provisionally defined in a vague or partial manner, and thereafter allowed to shift their meaning in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. Even a loaded but fairly stable term such as "ethnocentrism" is allowed significant drift in meaning. After a certain point, one begins to believe that such terms are merely tactical tools in Taruskin's arsenal, with their meaning sliding about according to his needs.

For example, the term "Romantic" is already notoriously difficult to fix, as critics from Arthur Lovejoy on have noted.<sup>48</sup> Taruskin sets its origin in the late 1700s in Germany, allowing him to combine his Germanophobia with the "genetic fallacy abusive" treatment of the term. He often identifies musical Romanticism with E. T. A. Hoffmann's famous 1814 article on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, skipping over the writings of figures such as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck. He does not discuss the use of the term "Romantic" by Friedrich Schiller and others to designate the art of Christian European culture, as opposed to that of the "Classical" culture of Greece and Rome. More seriously, he has not provided any serious discussion of what historians of ideas usually view as the clearest origin of Romanticism as a coherent artistic movement, namely the work of the group of authors centered around the short-lived *Athenaeum* (1798-1800).

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committing his "essentialist fallacy" (see Vol. 1, pp. 380-381). He also often invents far-fetched causal chains resulting from certain Romantic premises (for instance, see Vol. 2, pp. 641-651, where Hoffmann's influential essay on Beethoven ends up being responsible for the strictures of contemporary concert etiquette).

This is only a partial list of the fallacies that Taruskin has scolded other historians for committing, yet has committed copiously in his series. If one turns to David Hackett Fischer's *Historians' Fallacies*, one can find yet more. One could reasonably accuse Taruskin of committing the Baconian fallacy (Fischer, p. 4), the fallacy of many questions and the fallacy of false dichotomous questions (op. cit., pp. 9-10), the fallacy of declarative questions (p. 24), the fallacy of counterquestions (p. 28), the furtive fallacy (p. 74), the moralistic fallacy (p. 78), the pragmatic fallacy (p. 82), the fallacy of the insidious generalization (p. 124), the fallacy of presentism (p. 135), the didactic fallacy (p. 157), the fallacy of *post hoc, propter hoc* (p. 166), the reductive fallacy (p. 172), the fallacy of responsibility as cause (p. 182), the fallacy of the insidious analogy (p. 244), the fallacy of argument ad crumenam (p. 293), and the fallacy of argument ad nauseam (p. 302). The remainder of this essay will take note of some of these fallacies as they appear.

<sup>48</sup> See Arthur Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York: Capricorn Books, G. F. Putnam's Sons, 1960, c 1948).

Taruskin finds the kernel of Romanticism<sup>49</sup> in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, and he summarizes its core elements as follows:

[It] meant valuing difference and seeking one's uniqueness. It meant a life devoted to self-realization. It meant believing that the purpose of art was the expression of one's unique self, one's "original genius," a reality that only existed within. The purpose of such self-expression was the calling forth of a sympathetic response; but it had to be done "disinterestedly," for its own sake, out of an inner urge to communicate devoid of ulterior motive...(Vol. 2, p. 641)

This definition by enumeration is difficult to distinguish from the sort that one finds in undergraduate Music Appreciation courses. Although it serves somewhat effectively for the master narrative covering the last two hundred years of Taruskin's history (granted that it undergoes numerous alterations), it plainly does not meet the standards of serious intellectual history. Does this really describe "what Romanticism meant" to the actual historical actors or does it not rather describe what Taruskin says it *really* means?<sup>50</sup>

One can find relatively little in the *Athenaeum* that corresponds to Taruskin's definition. For example, in Friedrich Schlegel's writings, one finds a conception of literary theory that treats Shakespeare as the core of *romantische Fantasie*, "*romantisch*" "expressly declared to be a synonym of 'modern,' in contrast to the Classical poetry of antiquity."<sup>51</sup> As an aesthetic program reacting against the perceived limitations of a previous generation of authors, it aimed to capture the "fullness of life" and was

...more enamored of life than of beauty; content to take nothing less than everything for its province; resolved to possess and express the entire range of human experience; more interested in the individual variant than in the genetic type; sensible that the abundance and infinite interconnectedness of Nature are incompatible with any sharp cleavage of things from one another; aware that the distinctiveness, the idiosyncrasy, of the individual artist's vision is one of the elements in this abundance of Nature, and ought therefore not to be suppressed in art; and

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<sup>49</sup> Taruskin hedges his bets by stating that "romanticism was (and is) no single idea but a whole heap of ideas, some of them quite irreconcilable. Yet if it has a kernel, that kernel can be found in the opening paragraph of a remarkable book that appeared in Paris in 1782 under the title *Confessions*..." (Vol. 2, 641). One wishes that Taruskin had admitted to his conviction that Romanticism possessed the detailed kernel he describes, rather than employing the evasive formulation, "if it has a kernel, it is this...."

<sup>50</sup> In fact, it most closely resembles a circa-1980s conservative critique of countercultural attitudes. Here again, rather than telling history "as it actually was," Taruskin is clearly packaging the past in a form that the present can recognize.

<sup>51</sup> Lovejoy, pp. 196, 200-201

mindful that the task which it thus sets before itself is endless, and that no stage reached in the progress of it can be definitive.<sup>52</sup>

This is quite a different program than that found in Taruskin's definition. It goes without saying that Novalis' Romanticism is distinct from Schlegel's, and E. T. A. Hoffmann's from either. Although Hegel, whose philosophy Taruskin considers Romantic, shared certain aims with Friedrich Schlegel's Romanticism, he scorned what he viewed as their subjectivism and dilettantism.<sup>53</sup>

In Vol. 3, p. 63 and elsewhere Taruskin discusses the "solitary I" of Romanticism, and throughout the last half of his history, he focuses on Romanticism's tendency to foster "asocial" or "antisocial" behavior and aesthetic theories. It might surprise Taruskin to read the following about Hegel:

True to his ideal of the highest good, Hegel believed that the meaning of life could and should be achieved in the community alone. We find satisfaction and purpose in our lives, he argued, when, like the ancient Roman and Greek, we contribute to the common good and help to create its laws.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Lovejoy, p. 202. In Schlegel's early writings, in which Lovejoy believes can be found Schlegel's core aims, one finds that the principles of "the distinctively modern" include "a *lack* [added emphasis] of aesthetic disinterestedness and detachment on the part of the artist" (pp. 197-198).

For an important recent reconsideration of the early Romantics, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Philip Barnard, and Cheryl Lester, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, c1988).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Allen Speight, *Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 101: "Hegel had nothing but contempt for the notion of a fusion of poetry and philosophy that Schlegel suggested," and p. 102, fn. 26: "Hegel criticized Schlegel's notion of irony severely in his later *Philosophy of Right* (§140R)."

<sup>54</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel* (New York, Routledge, 2005), p. 43. A reliable reference work such as Christopher John Murray, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850* (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004) provides a much more nuanced appraisal than Taruskin has offered. In the article "Solitude and Community," for example, one finds the following:

If Romanticism was a period that promoted the image of the solitary individual, then, it is the same period that saw an explosion in communal ideas and ideals as well: of social philosophies dedicated to the cause of universal suffrage, for instance, and the popularization of literary genre (such as the ballad) intended for wide popular audiences. Just as significantly, the assertion of autonomy in this period is often conceived as a means of realizing a new basis for community in the first place (p. 1068).

Taruskin attempts to trace nearly everything he views as deleterious or ridiculous that has happened over the last two hundred years back to "Romanticism," limiting at times the meaning of "Romanticism" to one influential formulation (E. T. A. Hoffmann's), and then expanding it tactically when needed. In Taruskin's hands, the doleful consequences of Romanticism extend to the works of John Cage (Vol. 5, p. 67) and Brian Ferneyhough (Vol. 5, p. 476). However, if "Romanticism" implies deep inwardness in Novalis' or Hoffmann's sense, then it does not apply to Cage; but if it means the early Romantics' fusion of art with life and their conception of the fragment, then it would probably apply to Cage. However, the latter meaning would not apply to Ferneyhough, whereas Hoffmann's transcendent yearning would probably apply to Ferneyhough. Taruskin's "self-realization" would probably apply more accurately to the neo-Romantic John Corigliano or the Minimalist Philip Glass than to the Modernist Milton Babbitt.

Taruskin can indeed trace all sorts of later ideologies and events back to Romanticism, but very few of these genealogies can serve as credible explanations for what happened in the twentieth century, as a myriad of other events—world wars and the like—and causal chains have entered the picture in the meantime. Very often Taruskin is simply committing David Fisher Hackett's *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy, without even getting the "*hoc*" element right. Exponentially more current events and attitudes can be traced back to an earlier cause, especially when this cause ("Romanticism") is amorphously defined, than credible causal chains can be established emanating from the originating phenomenon. Put more simply, one could trace nearly every aspect of our current historical condition back in some way to Romanticism, to the Enlightenment, to the Reformation, to the invention of fire, or to any earlier significant past event. However, absent any reasonable standards for distinguishing credible causal chains from balderdash, most of these "explanations" would explain nothing at all.

Working in the opposite direction, Romantic movements of the early nineteenth century were some of the most fertile progenitors of artistic movements of the succeeding century and a half. One could trace the influence of early Romanticism on the creation of both lyrical poems and mammoth novels, of both short musical works and massive, hours-long symphonies; one could praise or blame it for nationalism, internationalism, religious revival, and secularism; one could trace its impact on early Transcendentalist literature and psychoanalysis, on surrealism and on both Abstractionism and Abstract Expressionism, on post-structuralism and deconstruction; one could view it as the origin of high-Romanticism, Wagnerian Romanticism, post-Wagnerian Romanticism, anti-Wagnerian Romanticism, Expressionism, ironic Neoclassicism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. Again, without a solid historical method, such derivations

are likely to explain little or nothing, especially if the later movement is considered "essentially" Romantic (as with Taruskin's oft-repeated claim that Modernism *is* "late, late Romanticism"). Taruskin ignores the most obvious explanation for the absurdities he has fallen into: one can be influenced by one or the other aspect of Romanticism, without *being* a "Romantic." Only this way can one explain how the Anglo-American Modernists could be resolutely anti-Romantic yet have been influenced by certain strands of the movement.

Moving to the twentieth century, one can see Taruskin's tactical treatment of key terms at work in his discussion of Modernism and the avant-garde. Both seem to be equally unhealthy children of the diseased parent Romanticism,<sup>55</sup> a term often enhanced with the ethnocentric shading of "German Romanticism." Unfortunately, Taruskin is trapped by his ideological commitments into covering over the fact that twentieth-century post-WW I Modernism in Anglo-American culture was overwhelmingly anti-Romantic; in fact, Taruskin has derived many of his anti-Romantic tropes directly from literary Modernism. But Taruskin is apparently opposed to Modernism, even when he is mimicking its anti-Romantic tirades.

He casts scorn on the avant-garde when it suits him; when not, he is for the avant-garde. Historically, as applied to the arts, the "avant-garde" is associated with a militantly progressive movement, i.e., an organization of like-minded individuals pushing toward a shared, future-oriented goal. Taruskin has repeatedly discussed the avant-garde in these terms over the course of a thousand pages or more. However, late in the twentieth century Taruskin suddenly reveals the "true" nature of the avant-garde to be a matter of countercultural marginalization and defection from the "status-quo," the latter equated with the "academic establishment" and this with the "bourgeoisie" (Vol. 5, pp. 366-367 and 370). Apparently, up until Taruskin discovered the true meaning of this term, all historical avant-gardists were guilty of using the term incorrectly.

From this point on, the "avant-garde" and "Modernism" are revealed to be antipodes, with "Modernism" representing entrenched interests and the avant-garde representing rebellion.<sup>56</sup> The "true avant-garde" is defined

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<sup>55</sup> See Vol. 5, p. 412, where Modernism is equated with Meyer's notion of "late, late Romanticism" (which is clearly an example of the fallacy of weak analogy); Vol. 2, p. 222, where the avant-garde is traced back to Wagner, with the Wagnerian avant-garde in Vol. 4 traced back to Hegelian history, which Taruskin views as "Romantic" (i.e., premised on rampant subjectivism, despite Hegel's opposition to rampant subjectivism); and Vol. 5, p. 413, where Taruskin claims that natural scientists "*infected* [added emphasis] Romantic artists with ideas about organicism and historical determinism."

<sup>56</sup> In his *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 39, Taruskin writes,

by its revolt against "yesterday's modernism" (Vol. 5, p. 367), by its "shock the bourgeoisie" attitude, and by its being a "force for change" (Vol. 5, p. 370).<sup>57</sup> However, in Vol. 4, Copland's early jazz-influenced *Music for the Theatre* is called "a typically *aggressive* [added emphasis] modernist bid for public notice" (p. 619), whereas Steve Reich's "*provocative modesty*" [added emphasis] in Vol. 5 (p. 370) is considered "genuinely avant-garde."<sup>58</sup> Given that it offended entrenched interests, one wonders why Copland's music would not represent an "avant-garde" bid for attention. Are Modernists now to be considered rabble-rousers and avant-gardists modest craftsmen? Yet Milton Babbitt, who Taruskin considers a paradigmatic Modernist, was not in the habit of making "aggressive" bids for public notice (i.e., a desire to "shock the status-quo").<sup>59</sup> But of course, as a Modernist, Babbitt was supposedly also a "late, late Romantic." In this

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*Avant-garde* and *modernist*, though often interchanged, are not synonyms. Where "avant-garde," originally a military term, properly connotes a combative, countercultural position, "modernist" has long come to imply an entrenched (indeed, a tenured) high-cultural one. The avant-garde is an outsider faction; modernists are insiders. One faction challenges authority; the other wields it. One stands to gain, the other to lose. And so *one is optimistic, the other pessimistic* [added emphasis]."

However, we learn on p. 446 of Vol. 5 of his *History of Western Music* that "Like all utopian ideas, *modernism is basically optimistic* [added emphasis]." Therefore, Modernists are basically (i.e., essentially) both optimistic and pessimistic. One hopes that Taruskin allows them to experience these essential states sequentially, rather than maintaining them simultaneously.

Note that the latter comment appears in a discussion historically subsequent to his sketch of 60s-era free-spirited Minimalists defecting from the dour, Modernist-dominated academies. Evidently these Modernists were both backward-looking and utopian, and they remained essentially optimistic while desperately fighting to prevent the loss of their entrenched power.

Certainly few of those who lived through the era under question have any memory of either a solid majority of power-wielding, utopian Modernists in any academy they attended, much less a crowd of cheerful, optimistic Modernists.

<sup>57</sup> If the avant-garde necessarily succeeds "Modernism"—a term that achieved broad currency only in the latter half of the nineteenth century—then it is difficult to understand what Modernism represented for the early nineteenth-century avant-gardists such as Olinde Rodrigues or Comte de St. Simon, or why they were rebelling against something that had not yet appeared. Perhaps Taruskin would respond that they were not "true" avant-gardists, for all their centrality in the coinage and propagation of this term. All one needs to do is re-write history, which Taruskin apparently believes it is his right as a historian to do. After all, he asserts at the end of Vol. 2 (p. 739) that the musical culture that we have inherited is "ours to modify as we see fit."

<sup>58</sup> It is exceedingly difficult to understand why Reich's *modesty* would be considered shocking to the "academic establishment," leading them to hurl "abuse" at him (p. 370).

<sup>59</sup> Sometimes one wonders if Taruskin means "to audiences of the time, such and such appeared 'Modernist' or 'avant-gardist,' as we would now use these terms." But at other times he insists on strict definitions, soon thereafter stretching them so far they become meaningless.



salad of meanings, Taruskin manoeuvres at will, rhetorically striking down the enemies who defy him, and managing to evade—at least in this Taruskinian alternate universe—any responsibility for defining his terms clearly and accurately and sticking with those definitions.<sup>60</sup>

Another example of Taruskin's tactical treatment of definitions can be found in his use of one of the favorite weapons in his arsenal, "ethnocentrism." On p. 739 of Vol. 3, Taruskin, in criticizing Paul Henry Lang's claims concerning the universal, timeless synthesis represented by Classicism, defines ethnocentrism as follows: "a single (and therefore partial) viewpoint, asserted on behalf of a powerful nation, that seeks dominance by representing itself as universal and impartial." Perhaps it is quibbling to note that any single viewpoint is partial; even multiple viewpoints are going to be partial as well. As no viewpoint can be

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<sup>60</sup> The primary source of Taruskin's confusion is that he is in fact talking in amateur-sociological terms about "rebels" and "authorities," and not about the "avant-garde" and "modernism"; his definitions have no content in terms of the actual artistic movements being discussed. He apparently has not considered with any seriousness the possibility that avant-gardists could become an insider faction and the Modernists remain an outsider faction.

The consequences of adopting Taruskin's sociological definitions become increasingly puzzling as one applies them to the real world. Were the Modernist poets Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound, because they were outsiders, therefore avant-gardists? As Joseph Straus has demonstrated ("The Myth of Serial 'Tyranny' in the 1950s and 1960s," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 3 [Autumn, 1999], pp. 301-343), by far the majority of immediate post-WW II American academic composers were tonalists; because they were "the establishment," were they therefore all Modernists? On pp. 428-429, Taruskin describes the failure of Modernism to shock an audience (in Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*), yet admits on p. 429 that "It [i.e., Modernism] was still possible to shock" in terms of the Third Quartet by the Modernist George Rochberg; in both cases, Modernism is described in terms of its potential shock value, but elsewhere Taruskin defines the avant-garde precisely in these same terms. A similar degree of confusion appears on p. 426: Taruskin's personal judgment that George Crumb's music has not *worn well* (added emphasis) is attributed to both Modernist desire for novelty and its closeness to "going avant-garde styles"; here Modernism and the avant-garde are apparently equated with each other. (Beyond this terminological confusion, Taruskin manages in this single paragraph simultaneously 1) to violate the pledge in his Introduction to not allow his tastes to intrude upon the history he is telling, and 2) to mask his editorializing in the pseudo-objective technique of presenting quotations by other musicians, but only those that support his viewpoint.)

Taruskin considers New Complexity composers to be Modernists (= "late, late Romantics," Vol. 5, p. 476); are the unemployed New Complexity composers whose music apparently "threatens" academically-entrenched Minimalists therefore in fact avant-gardists, and are these Minimalists, because they are in the establishment, therefore Modernists? What kind of sociological-cum-attitudinal definition of "Modernist" could credibly include outsiders such as the young Aaron Copland and present-day New Complexity composers, insiders such as Milton Babbitt and Pierre Boulez, iconoclasts such as Olivier Messiaen, rebels such as Ezra Pound and Varèse, establishment figures such as T.S. Eliot, and businessmen such as Wallace Stevens and Charles Ives?

universal, the parenthetical comment is redundant, and the logical connector "therefore" is a solecism.

Taruskin is, of course, an opponent of universalism, except when it comes to supposed universal laws of human musical comprehension and the universal need for tonality, as seen in his implied endorsement of the views of Fred Lerdahl and Leonard Meyer (Vol. 5, pp. 445-454). He also excepts himself from his opposition to universalism when he makes universalist judgments, which are sprinkled throughout his text and found in more virulent form in his public criticism.<sup>61</sup>

More troubling, though, is that Taruskin apparently does not seem to understand that both such universalist pronouncements and his decision to write a partisan, America-first history of the last fifty years of Western music meet fairly precisely his own definition of ethnocentrism, especially when one takes into consideration his position as one of America's leading musicologists. According to his own definition of ethnocentrism, and in view of his own statements and his leading role in the musical community (i.e., Taruskin was included in a *BBC Music Magazine* list as "one of the 60 most powerful figures in the musical world today"<sup>62</sup>) one could easily consider Taruskin one of the most influential—and therefore, dangerous—ethnocentrists in the musical world today.

Throughout his history, Taruskin continually traces ethnocentrism back to German roots in Johann Gottfried Herder and Romanticism. He often paints the entire German cultural rebirth of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in conspiratorial tones, thereby committing what David Hackett Fischer calls "the furtive fallacy."<sup>63</sup> Although in the *History of Western Music*, his ethnocentric bias usually appears in civil form, in his public criticism, a more noxious tone often prevails. For example, in his

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<sup>61</sup> One of the more odious examples of this is his faux-Boulez pronouncement that "musicians who have not experienced—I do not say understood but truly experienced—the necessity of greater consonance are useless, for their entire work brings them up short of the needs of their time," in "North (Europe) by Northwest (America)," *New York Times*, April 18, 2004. Taruskin thus judges the "entire work" of perhaps millions of his musical peers—most of whom being unaware of Taruskin's requirement that they undergo his subjective experience—to be practically worthless. Their crime lies in not serving the needs of the time, as defined by the musicologist Richard Taruskin.

In his strictures against universalism Taruskin repeatedly relies on what David Detmer has called the "self-referential inconsistency argument": in short, making a universal statement asserting that universal statements are not allowed (or, as in the previous paragraph, making a universal statement that is a special exception—presumably because it is Taruskin's strongly-held personal belief—to the claim that universal statements are not allowed). This and other fallacies commonly committed in the Postmodern discourse are thoroughly analyzed in Detmer's *Challenging Postmodernism: Philosophy and the Politics of Truth* (New York: Humanity Books, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> [http://berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2001/03/22\\_rusia.html](http://berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2001/03/22_rusia.html), accessed Dec. 21, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Fischer, pp. 74-78.

review article "The Musical Mystique,"<sup>64</sup> Taruskin writes that "German Romanticism," with its apparently malignant "defense of the autonomy of the human subject as manifested in art that is created out of a purely aesthetic, hence disinterested, impulse..." "began as an ethnocentric creed." Beyond the unreliability of Taruskin's portrayal of the evil deeds of Moses Mendelssohn and Immanuel Kant in this conspiracy and the supposedly devastating cultural consequences,<sup>65</sup> one must note that if one accepts the definition of ethnocentrism Taruskin gives on p. 739 of Vol. 2, this tradition should not be considered ethnocentric. Germany was not a "powerful nation" at that time. German speakers formed minorities in many states and majorities in dozens of others, but there was no "Germany," except in the sense of a cultural community. Prussia was the most powerful of these states, but it was very small; Bavaria was the largest, but it was politically impotent.

Taruskin, however, appears always ready to shift definitions of his key terms when he wants to use them another way. Thus, in Vol. 2, p. 670, he implicitly defines ethnocentrism as the tendency "to cast one's own cherished values as 'universal' values, good (and therefore binding) for all"; in Vol. 1 we read, "Judging cultures by the standards of other cultures (most often, by the standards of one's own culture) is called ethnocentrism..." These definitions, unlike the previous ones cited, would properly allow Taruskin to condemn as ethnocentric the vague, essentialist notion of

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<sup>64</sup> *The New Republic*, Oct. 22, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> In the same article, Taruskin continues,

Such art is without utilitarian purpose (although, as Kant famously insisted, it is "purposive"), but it serves as the symbolic embodiment of human freedom and as the vehicle of transcendent metaphysical experience. This is the most asocial definition of artistic value ever promulgated. Artists, responsible to themselves alone, provide a model of human self-realization. All social demands on the artist—whether made by church, state, or paying public—and all social or commercial mediation are inimical to the authenticity of the creative product.

Taruskin has not managed to explain why an approach to art that viewed it as the embodiment of human freedom is asocial; one would think precisely the contrary, given that art so considered would inherently contain a social purpose and even a social message. Taruskin has also neglected to explain why this approach to art, which motivated the creation of concert series, civic orchestras and choruses, and music festivals—initially throughout German-speaking regions of Europe and later in other areas as well—could be considered inherently asocial. Taruskin appears so concerned to cast the growing artistic freedom of composers in the worst possible light that he is willing to ignore or downplay historical changes that should have been at the forefront of his concern.

According to Taruskin, this pernicious creed was responsible for much of what occurred in nineteenth and twentieth-century music. Many music lovers would consider this one of the most extraordinary periods any art form has ever experienced; apparently Taruskin believes it was all a catastrophic mistake.

"Romanticism" he has devised. However, they would also condemn his own attitudes and actions with unremitting force.

### **E.1. Ideology<sup>66</sup>**

This sort of shifting-about of the meanings of terms is characteristic of what some might consider a master of rhetoric, others a master of propaganda. Especially in Vol. 5, presentations of composers' music and positions are often tilted to reflect Taruskin's preferences, whether this be by dramatic highlighting, suppression of balancing evidence, ad hominem and/or sociologically-shaded dismissals of supporting or critical voices, or by the use of subtle linguistic shading. Demonstrations of these species of bias often require detailed examination of Taruskin's tactics, which will be offered in the five case studies found in Part 2 of this review.

One great difficulty here is that Taruskin wears the neutral facade of an objective historian, having assured the reader of his objectivity in his Introduction; if he had made clear that his history was in fact a sort of engaged history, the reader could have judged it on those terms. In this sense, Taruskin resembles the most dangerous ideologues, in that he does not state his ideology clearly and openly.

His ideology is apparently a combination of a reactionary artistic program and a progressively-intended political stance. His artistic program is not a matter of simple restorationism (i.e., the restoration of tonality and a listener-centered aesthetic common before the nineteenth century), because by Vol. 5 it is clear that Taruskin believes in a forward momentum to history, and even pushes it along with increasing vigor toward the end of his epic and his subject. It lies much closer to radicalized reactionary political movements, which gain their appeal by aping the dynamic historical conception and activism of progressive movements; the goal may be to restore this or that past element, but this goal is presented as part of a future-oriented ideal.<sup>67</sup>

In Taruskin's view, the history of the last two hundred years is defined by the progressive unfolding of a mistaken aesthetic idea, namely

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<sup>66</sup> In general I use "ideology" in a value-neutral sense, as a fairly stable set of idea-structures and norms shared by a social group; these may, as in political and artistic ideologies, serve as motivations for action. Taruskin, however, uses it almost exclusively in a crypto-Marxist sense of "false ideology of the elites," although he disclaims any relationship to Marxist historiography. When the term is used in this loaded sense, I will surround it with the appropriate scare quotes.

<sup>67</sup> Interestingly enough, Taruskin wants to de-emancipate composers at the same time as he apparently wants to emancipate musicology from its traditional responsibilities of presenting a reliable and balanced historical portrayal (e.g., forbidding the musicologist from suppressing inconvenient facts), of developing a reliable methodology and sticking to it, of defining terms accurately and consistently, and of adhering strictly to logic.

the "poietic fallacy" that he blames on Romanticism; composer-centered aesthetic theories (leading to the emancipation of dissonance, atonality, and a host of other sins), Modernism, and a split between composers and the audience are three of its symptoms (as noted, the status of avant-gardism shifts according to Taruskin's needs).<sup>68</sup> The main narrative thread in the latter part of Volume 5 involves on the one hand the de-emancipation of dissonance and the restoration of tonality to its former primacy, and, on the other, the de-emancipation of the composer and the "liberation" of the listener. In order to make it appear that all of this is part and parcel of a progressive historical trend, Taruskin must reverse the meaning of any words implying "forward" and "backward" in relationship to history. Restoration of tonality is "progressive" or "avant-garde" (for example, in the discussion of David del Tredici, Vol. V, p. 444, or in the chapter on Minimalism, "A Harmonious Avant-Garde"), whereas holding on to Modernist principles is "backwards" or "conservative."<sup>69</sup> The "true avant-garde" consists of those composers leading the path back to tonality, with the "conservative" Modernists holding up historical progress. At times, though, the Postmodernist side of Taruskin appears, using these terms in an almost nonsensical fashion.<sup>70</sup> The overall propagandistic aims are clear,

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<sup>68</sup> Certain composers, such as Tchaikovsky, are portrayed as holding out against this tide; thus, his anachronistic claim that Tchaikovsky held to an eighteenth-century outlook (Vol. 4, pp. 141-142).

<sup>69</sup> For example, in the discussion of Rochberg, Vol. V, p. 429, or his dismissal of the New Complexity, p. 476, where this movement is described as an "embattled reaction against the advancing tide." It is therefore surprising to find Taruskin in Vol. 1, pp. 145, maintaining the following:

Depending on his or her style, an artist is judged either "advanced" ("forward-looking," "progressive") or "regressive" ("backward-looking," "conservative"). To make such a judgment, of course, is unwittingly to turn style into politics...[O]ne is most apt to regard artists and whole artistic movements as "ahead of their time" or as "lagging behind" it. These are invidious judgments, and (except as historical events in their own right) irrelevant to history. Everything possible will be done in this book to avoid them.

Which, alas, makes our story even harder to tell, since it militates against the construction of a single linear narrative.

Evidently Taruskin's good intentions only lasted him about a third of the way through his epic; from this point on, the master narrative of a sort of fall from grace with the advent of artistic autonomy takes over, and Taruskin begins pushing Western musical history ever faster toward its doom.

<sup>70</sup> Note, in Vol. 3, p. 673, Taruskin's claim that Beethoven's collaboration with Maelzel in providing testimonials for his metronome "cast Beethoven in a rather unheroic light, as a sort of musical market speculator." He then claims that this behavior was "no less typical or 'progressive' a role for a musician in economically unsettled times." This statement is difficult to make sense of, but his aim of undermining the avant-gardist connotations of artistic progressiveness by using the term "progressive" in these unflattering circumstances

though: Taruskin is intending to overthrow what he casts as *the* Germanic/Romantic narrative of music as a story of historical progress that led (mistakenly, in his view) to the overthrow of tonality; in order to push history to restore tonality, he needs to undermine the "traditional narrative" by confusing all of its terms. That this "traditional narrative" is largely a matter of Taruskin's invention, created by fusing different historical narratives, is never revealed to the reader.<sup>71</sup>

However, as concerns social issues, Taruskin clearly views himself as somewhat of an Enlightenment figure, relentlessly attacking the elites of society, and speaking out for equal rights and democracy; he clearly is aiming to support those goals with his history. Unfortunately, Taruskin never presents a credible system of ideas or theory of society that could serve as the basis of his engaged history. He excoriates universalist "ideologies" (for example, Vol. 1, p. XV and Vol. 3, pp. 738-739), yet chastises his own country for ignoring the rights of minorities (Vol. 3, p. 739); he speaks of "an unjustifiable status quo" (apparently intending Western art music and ratifying the radical egalitarianism of ethnomusicologist John Blacking) supporting "a socially destructive value system" in Western culture that "has lent support to imperialism and racism and sexism (Vol. 5, p. 382). One is left to wonder where these assumed rights and standards of judgment come from if not from a universalist ideology that demands that all humans be granted basic human rights.

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is clear. On pp. 411-412 of Vol. 5, he validates Minimalist music for its being "of the present" in opposition to an outdated agenda of Modernism, yet claims that "this very confusion...between what was progressive and what was conservative, and an attendant loss of interest in making the distinction" signaled a fundamental ideological change associated with Postmodernism. The confusion is largely Taruskin's, as the claim to be overcoming an outdated ideology signals anything but a loss of interest in making the distinction between "before" and "after."

<sup>71</sup> For instance, Franz Brendel's history is not that of an overturning of tonality. Neither is Max Weber's sociological/structural-functionalist history (*The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, trans. and ed. by Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel, and Gertrude Neuwirth [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969, c1958]). However, Weber's method and basic outlook are not "left-Hegelian" in nature, whereas Brendel's are. Weber's historic rationale was employed by T. W. Adorno and extended in order to justify the overturning of tonality by the Second Viennese School. Weber's rationale, however, was explicitly non-Marxist, whereas Adorno, especially in his historical approach, was strongly influenced by Marx, although he practiced a highly undogmatic form of Marxism that was condemned by Marxist hard-liners. Carl Dahlhaus's approach to history is dramatically different from Adorno's, and is explicitly oriented against the Adornian-Marxist model, although he is also influenced by "right Hegelianism."

The foregoing paragraph presents the positions of but a small selection of authors from a remarkably rich tradition of historical writing about music. Taruskin repeatedly reduces a complex legacy of German musical scholarship and philosophy to a sort of Cliff Notes level, to which he affixes the pejorative label "Romantic."

## E.2. Egalitarianism

Taruskin tends to equate "the audience" with "society," setting them against the "elites," but in the historical setting he is discussing, most of the population is left out of this game. Taruskin's basic tactic of setting elites against the rest of society appears to be trapped in a sociological model appropriate to earlier historical periods. When small aristocratic and religious groups held most of the political and representational power, the aristocracy was "society."<sup>72</sup> Especially in the nineteenth century, this dominance of an aristocratic elite was challenged by the stunning expansion of bourgeois economic, cultural, and eventually political power. Taruskin's historical drama seems fixated on the heroic moment in which the progressive cultural power resided with the ascendant middle classes: "the audience" that is Taruskin's concern over his last few volumes is still the middle-class or upper middle-class audience. However, when one moves into the twentieth century, one faces a dramatic expansion of literacy and political power among "the masses," with a concomitant diversification of interests and tastes. In this changed situation, there seems to be little justification for Taruskin's assumption that a representative function of near-universal legitimacy exists for any given musical audience.

At the end of Vol. 3 (pp. pp. 736-737), Taruskin decries the growing gap between "producers" and "consumers" of music, and he treats this divide by Vol. 5 as reaching crisis proportions. Given Taruskin's egalitarian aims, there appears to be no solution that will equalize all participants in a mass society other than ending the Western tradition of music,<sup>73</sup> i.e., collapsing all differences in training and ending "elite" dominance by finishing off musical literacy. Apparently, John Blacking's views concerning ethnomusicology, which Taruskin cites approvingly and at

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<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, trans. Thomas Burger, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Vol. 5, p. 163, where Taruskin blithely claims that Classical music was "always a social divider in America." He ignores the fact that Classical music ensembles have also served as a binding force for communities. They have not necessarily included everyone in the community, because not everyone has an interest in Classical music. They have been racially and sexually segregated in the past, but they have also served to foster integration. Classical music organizations have also continually served to offer professional accomplishment and advancement to people who would otherwise not have had these opportunities.

A basic problem with Taruskin's "furtive fallacy" is revealed here: any voluntary association of individuals could be accused by Taruskin of fostering "social division." Yet it should be obvious—indeed, it is a basic tenet of sociology—that any large social group will naturally tend to break into sub-groups. There is no conspiracy here; this is simply what happens in reality. Taruskin obviously ignores the possibility that voluntary associations of individuals might also foster social cohesion. There are significant problems to be faced in the balance of the society as a whole as against its various subgroups, but Taruskin's sociology is clearly too simplistic to comprehend them.

length in Vol. 5, pp. 380-383, serve as a sort of credo for Taruskin. Blacking believed that

"humanly organized sound" was a necessary precondition to "soundly organized humanity," from which it followed that music could—should?—be valued according to the degree to which it reflected that reciprocity and furthered the implied objective of social harmony (p. 380).

It was indeed obvious that social criteria of artistic value had been tyrannically abused under totalitarian regimes. But Blacking...argued that the opposite tendency—toward individualism and the competitive display of skill and originality—had reached a similar, no less deplorable condition of abuse in the highly developed technological societies of postwar Western Europe and America (p. 380).

Note that activities such as learning to perform an instrument in a highly skilled manner are very nearly equated with totalitarian repression.

Blacking favored treating all music as folk music, opposed hierarchies, and insisted on politicizing all aspects of the discipline (p. 382).<sup>74</sup> In the following pages in Vol. 5, Taruskin approvingly describes Steve Reich's music in these terms, focusing on the submission of individuality to the group.

It is disturbing to see Taruskin treating Blacking's theory as a sort of ideal, given that it was written with one example of "egalitarian democracy" fresh in memory, and one soon to come, namely China's Cultural Revolution and the killing fields of Cambodia. Taruskin appears to have no comprehension of the dangers of radical egalitarianism, especially when applied to large societies, whose scale and complexity no longer make such solutions either credible or humane.

Taruskin also appears to have little awareness of the crucial roles that civic society can fulfill various cultures.<sup>75</sup> In discussing Brahms's circle of musicians and admirers, Taruskin sees something vaguely sinister and undemocratic in their forming such a small, voluntary, and informal musical circle (Vol. 3, pp. 742-3). For example, he writes (committing both the fallacy of many questions and the furtive fallacy),

But there is also the self-satisfaction of belonging to a self-defined elite—an emotion that is gratified through exclusion. And that is where

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<sup>74</sup> "[T]he new ethnomusicology (and the 'new musicology' that emerged in response to it) refused to allow that there is any nonpolitical alternative; there are only covertly political ones" (Vol. V, p. 382).

<sup>75</sup> There is a vast literature on this subject; much recent work has developed out of the thought of both Hannah Arendt (especially in *The Human Condition* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958]) and Jürgen Habermas (especially in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, op. cit.).



esoteric, "difficult" art inevitably becomes controversial in a postaristocratic, "democratic" age....does it foster social division? Is that social division a threat to social harmony? Is the protection of social harmony something societies, and their institutions of enforcement and control...have an obligation to promote?

If Taruskin means to imply an affirmative answer to these questions, then this represents a chilling moral relativism that deprives him of any legitimacy as a social critic. It is difficult to distinguish these points of view from those of supporters of totalitarian regimes.

Taruskin employs similar language in discussing Arnold Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performance, Vol. 4, pp. 351-352; again, he commits both fallacies.

Immediately upon the end of the First World War...they organized a sort of concert bureau...It was subsidized by subscriptions...Its offerings were not advertised in the papers, and critics were never invited....One had to promise never to write about the performances for publication...(p. 351)

Not only the public but the performers, too were watchdogged. The Society's Statement of Aims....included the proviso that "performers will be chosen preferably from among the younger and less well known artists...artists of high-priced reputation will be used only so far as the music demands and permits..." The benefits of self-subsidy...were tangible: the performances given by Schoenberg's Society before its tiny coterie audience, thanks to its mandated insistence on adequate rehearsal, were legendary in their accuracy..." (p. 352)

[Speaking about developments extending from the New German School:]

The public was at best irrelevant to this history, at worst a brake on it. Art needed protection from people. It needed the sanctuary that Schoenberg's Society provided for it. (More recently, that sanctuary has been sought in institutions of higher learning.) ...Does the public have any legitimate claim on artists? Are artists entitled to social support without any requirement of a reciprocal social responsibility? Has society a right to expect from the artists it supports work of social value? Does protection from the public help or hinder the development of art? Does there come a point when a stocktaking becomes possible—or necessary?...Most disquieting of all for the twentieth century, the great century of democracy and totalitarianism alike, is Schoenberg's most central precept..."If it is art it is not for everybody; if it is for everybody it is not art." Can such a proposition be defended in a democracy? (p. 353)

Again, Taruskin does not appear to understand that democracy is not a system that requires social leveling, but is rather a system that ideally provides equal rights to all members of a state, and attempts, by legal, administrative, and judicial means, to balance out competing rights in a fair manner.

Schoenberg's Society was a private organization with voluntary membership. It was not a racist organization or a violent cult; the members joined in order to listen to music. In fact, it was quite progressive for its time, in that it was international, non-racist, and egalitarian in its treatment of performers. Taruskin describes its activities in conspiratorial tones (note his wording: "watchdogged," "coterie audience," etc.), but these are the activities that can be expected from any private club: both a Statement of Aims that members voluntarily agree to and voluntary attendance at meetings. It did not use any public funds. If such an organization were to be formed in the United States, the First Amendment rights to peaceable assembly would legally protect it from attempts by demagogues to break into it and ban activities of which they disapprove.<sup>76</sup>

The implied positive answers to Taruskin's questions in the last paragraph cited above are frightening. Artists have to work hard to reach a professional level, and they pay large amounts of their own money for lessons and education. Once they have reached professional status, who, in Taruskin's egalitarian utopia, gets to decide what services they should provide for society? If they refuse to provide work of "social value" (and who decides this social value?), will they be sent to a re-education camp or banned from their profession? Who will do the final stocktaking, and what are the penalties for failing to meet the standards?

Finally, Schoenberg's statement is perfectly defensible in an open-society democracy. It is an opinion, and in the United States, such opinions are protected by our Bill of Rights. Not everyone need share these opinions, but all such opinions can be debated in a free and open manner. Taruskin's apparent belief that opinions such as the one Schoenberg expressed should not be allowed in a democracy is in fact fundamentally opposed to open-society democratic principles.

One wonders if Taruskin believes that it is inherently undemocratic to join MENSA, to create a poetry circle, or to form an orchestra and hold auditions in order to find the best players. His political model is not sophisticated enough to handle a proliferation of such mini-societies, which apparently leads him to dismiss most of them from consideration.<sup>77</sup> As

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<sup>76</sup> Taruskin's conspiratorial tone in questioning the right of individuals to write for small circles is especially troubling when one recalls the danger that a single poet such as Joseph Brodsky posed for a powerful totalitarian regime as a result of his decision to write poetry for himself, for his friends, and for underground circles.

<sup>77</sup> Taruskin goes so far as to attack academic disciplines other than his own with the dreaded charge of "elitism." Music written and performed in graduate programs (what he calls "PhD. music") is "frankly elitist, in the strongest sense of the word, since by its very nature it selects and maintains a social elite" (Vol. 5, p. 162). This is, simply put, sloppy thinking. Every profession enforces professional standards, and the enforcement of these standards will inevitably include some people and exclude others. Those who remain form a sort of "society" in the sense that they work together on a regular basis. Taruskin should recognize this situation: as a senior professor, he has sat for years on tenure committees

concerns Western music, he is only concerned about "the audience," which in his eyes apparently means only the traditional concert audience, this supposedly representing the whole of society. However, since the nineteenth century and within the sphere of "Classical music," there has arisen a pluralism of mini-societies with different skills and training, and, as a result, an array of different audiences. Taruskin's monolithic theory, such that it is, cannot make sense of their existence.

### E.3. Power

Corresponding to this descent into monolithic egalitarianism, Taruskin has no credible theory of power. In his view, apparently the elites are always those who hold power, and are in some vague way bad. This scarcely qualifies as a credible theory; rather, it appears to represent an attempt at resentment-laced populism, which presents its own dangers. Does Taruskin truly believe that it is socially harmful for one person to take on the role of conductor of a musical ensemble (see, for example, Vol. 2, pp. 111-112)? Is the existence of the position of C.E.O. of a corporation also inherently damaging to society? Are scientific elites to be banned from Taruskin's utopia? How does Taruskin propose running a society as complex as ours is without a leadership structure?

If Taruskin were to accept theoretical responsibility for the necessity of leaders—i.e., that leaders are not necessarily oppressing those under them in the hierarchy—than he would have to surrender one of his most potent rhetorical tools, namely the insinuation that power structures and elites are somehow bad by nature, with the implied consequence that society is inherently damaged by their presence. As Taruskin rarely presents any validation of "good elites"—by-and-large hiding evidence of their existence<sup>78</sup>—or the beneficial exercise of power, one is left sensing a vaguely conspiratorial undertone whenever the terms "elite" and "power" appear.

Taruskin's egalitarian model is dangerous, in that it leaves the door open only to charismatic leadership, which, as the twentieth century has demonstrated, is the most dangerous solution of all in a modern society.<sup>79</sup> It

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deciding which of his junior colleagues should be allowed into the rank of tenured professors and which should face the end of their employment at that institution.

<sup>78</sup> This evidence is, however, often hiding in plain view in the form of his beloved audience-friendly composers such as Gioachino Rossini, Tchaikovsky, and Benjamin Britten.

<sup>79</sup> Note Taruskin's breathless description, Vol. 5, p. 384, of the state achieved in Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* "in which all the players, the composer included, impersonally submit, sacrificing their individual freedom not to a specially empowered individual who alone is free," [here Taruskin is referring to the dangerous "autonomous composer"] "but to a collective and transcendent ideal of ecstasy-producing accuracy."

would be useful for Taruskin to admit that people fulfilling leadership functions and elites bearing specialized knowledge are necessary to the functioning of any complex society such as ours is. Certainly his own position as an elite figure in an elite university would not be possible in a radically egalitarian "democracy."

#### E.4. Elites and Prestige

In the absence of a political theory that would take responsibility for its core convictions—namely, one requiring adherence to universalist humanistic principles, which would inevitably require that one work with and participate in power structures, the only credible means of enforcing these principles—one is left with infinite options for placing the blame elsewhere. Where better than with the "elites" of history, whose identity shifts as swiftly as Taruskin's ideological needs? They are at various times kings, administrative officials, intellectual elites, economic elites, crusading critics, penniless artists struggling away in a garret, or even those art-lovers who are moved by unusual artworks.

In Taruskin's version of history, the elites decide who the great composer is, what the terms for understanding music are, and the like. Thus, artworks have no intrinsic meaning; rather, this meaning is created by audiences, which are conditioned by elite tastes. However, as mentioned above, Taruskin is not consistent on this point; he often points out felicities in works that apparently transcend the original elites' period of rule, indicating that there is intrinsic aesthetic worth in certain pieces of music and not others.<sup>80</sup> But if meaning is solely determined by the audience, the notion of "intrinsic worth" is not credible, as not only are the original audiences and original structures for understanding the music no longer with us, but also a multitude of audience reactions of the greatest variety are in evidence over the last two centuries.<sup>81</sup> Apparently, the only morally

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Note that all of these performers who were liberated by submission to a non-composer-centered group ecstasy were members of an ensemble named after the composer (i.e., Steve Reich and Musicians). One might note as well that this is a professional ensemble with extremely rigorous standards, i.e., the sort of group that in other circumstances Taruskin would consider exclusive and even "elitist."

<sup>80</sup> Perhaps Taruskin should have emulated Michel Foucault, whose historical model was similarly tendentious but more sophisticated. Foucault understood that a deflationary approach to intellectual history must be consistent to be credible. Foucault was pitiless; Taruskin is sentimental. Therein lies Taruskin's greatest appeal to those who approve his favorites and his master narrative of history, whose outcome is a necessary return to tonality. But therein as well lies the underlying incoherence of his historical method.

<sup>81</sup> This fundamental conflict appears in Taruskin's discussion of Beethoven's music in Vol. 2. After running through a series of tropes that have been used to explain his music on p. 670, on p. 671 Taruskin states, "That such attributes *were not inherent in Beethoven but constructed by listeners and interpreters* [added emphasis] is certainly suggested by the

defensible manner of listening to any music in Taruskin's utopia would be via several layers of "bracketings"<sup>82</sup>—i.e., warnings that listeners are falling into one or the other habit fostered by the "great man" theory of interpretation or one of its poietic kin—whose details can only be reliably provided by an elite culture critic such as himself. Even then, one should still be wary of falling into the error of believing that some sliver of intrinsic meaning of the artwork was actually speaking across the centuries. Obviously, the entire notion of spontaneous audience approval of musical works from an earlier period could not survive this policing.

Of course, if elites are always controlling the discourse in any given historical period, then even if we could discover "what music meant" to ordinary audiences on the basis of their own testimony, there would have to be other meanings lurking behind that testimony. Perhaps this is the reason for the paucity in Taruskin's history of reactions by ordinary listeners to the music they have heard; one suspects that Taruskin would view these as fatally compromised by elite discourse. Nevertheless, he consistently gives the impression that there is a populist groundswell lurking beneath the elite validation system, juxtaposing Tchaikovsky the populist to Brahms the elitist, or Britten to Carter, or Bernstein to the elite composers of the academy. He often mocks the elites in chapter headings such as "Elites and Their Discontents" (Vol. 5, p. 161). He seems to have a very clear and distinct notion of who the elites are, and tends to describe their efforts in withering tones.

Taruskin has apparently never fully registered the possibility that his favored populist composers were in fact elites in their time. In terms of prestige, Tchaikovsky was at the pinnacle of the Russian musical system and was regularly rubbing shoulders with the power elite of his day; Britten dominated his country's musical scene during his lifetime in a manner rarely seen in recent musical history, and Bernstein, "the most famous classical musician in the world" (Vol. 5, p. 431), sat atop the American musical power structure.

One could maintain that a composer such as Britten achieved his beloved status "naturally," but Taruskin admits, in a short discussion concerning the eclipse of Menotti's stature and Britten's continued success

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fact [*sic*] of his actual career. The remarkable thing is the way in which he was accepted both by the new mass public and by the old aristocratic one..." However, on p. 720 he speaks of the music of Beethoven and later symphonic composers in terms of "music that at once demands and thwarts paraphrase," and cites Charles Rosen's characterization of this repertoire as follows: "metaphorical description is called for, and even necessary...but none will be satisfactory or definitive." Here Taruskin is obviously dealing with pieces of music that contain inherent qualities that transcend their immediate contexts. If all the attributes assigned to the music could in fact be "constructed by the listeners," then nothing could "thwart" the attempt to assign these meanings to the music.

<sup>82</sup> "Bracketing" is a Husserlian term that is obviously here being used figuratively.

(Vol. 5, p. 227), that this outcome might have resulted from discussions and public advocacy. He thus implicitly admits that Britten's music was the recipient of the "prestige machine," yet also appears to treat this machine as revealing the intrinsic value of Britten's music.<sup>83</sup>

This is a rare slip-up, though; in general, Taruskin hides evidence that his favored populist composers were elites or benefited from validation campaigns that might have tilted audience tastes in their favor. He appears to believe that there is a certain *je ne sais quoi* that has won Tchaikovsky a permanent place in audience's hearts, a fact of which he without reservation approves, but in Brahms's and Wagner's cases overlays discussions of their influence with furtive hints.

Underlying the past or present popularity of any of these composers, though, is the simple fact that art music is an art form interwoven with the power structures of a society; the greater the success of any given art music, the greater the intertwinement. Taruskin often implies that the association with power structures determines the meaning of any given music, but in general he does this only when "bad elites" are involved. When "good elites" are the subject, this connection mysteriously disappears.

Thus, a central problem for Taruskin's historical method is that he cannot convincingly demonstrate the difference between what one might call "natural" (i.e., spontaneous) and "artificial" (i.e., elite-created and -enforced) audience acceptance without so to speak stepping in and tilting the playing field so that the results come out the way he would like. He cannot offer an example of a repertoire not tainted by prestige, because once any piece gains advocates, it has already become the recipient of validation by some "elite" group. For "difficult" composers such as Elliott Carter, Taruskin flaunts the evidence that influential critics and patrons helped make their careers successful, but in the cases of his favored composers such as Tchaikovsky, Britten, and Reich, he simply hides most of it.

Taruskin seems to be demanding a utopian state in which all of the musical repertoire is prestige-free, yet somehow magically satisfies audience needs. This, however, would require that people not attach value to any music or advocate for it; it would require a "flat" sociological model, with no conflicting tastes, no centers of power, and thus, no large professional organizations such as orchestras; no educational centers, no teachers, no concert presenters. In other words, this would wipe out most of the existing infrastructure of music. Such an egalitarian state could only be maintained by forcing people to think alike and preventing them from

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<sup>83</sup> Note how the advocacy of Elliott Carter's music by a small group of critics and musicians such as Andrew Porter and Charles Rosen turns Carter into a beneficiary—and creation—of a "prestige machine" (see, for example, Vol. 5, pp. 301). In contrast, Taruskin hides all evidence that a large swath of the critical establishment and arts funding in England was dedicated to furthering the music and career of Benjamin Britten.

forming independent (therefore "elite") sub-groupings. It is far less likely that a democratic, egalitarian society would result from this than that the void would be filled from above, as it was in the Soviet Union.

One irritating result of his ideological commitments is that, for any composer that Taruskin clearly believes is the beneficiary of "bad elite" validation—whether this is received from a government, a university, a publisher, fellow composers, or even a few critics—contrasting reactions to the composer's music are, so to speak, stacked against the composer. Supportive reactions for such composers are given a sociological reading—i.e., the support can be traced to the respondent's membership in the same university, same social class, same "Modernist" ideology, and so forth—whereas negative reactions are presented as the honest reactions of "the audience." Taruskin apparently assumes that audiences who are not educated in or affiliated with certain identifiable academies, literary circles, and the like, are in some way untainted.

This, however, would be to ignore the fact that no listener goes into a concert or any other musical experience untainted by ideological influence. The historical ideologies of the educated classes are far easier to track than those of the less-literate classes, but the latter are still influenced by ideologies; indeed, one might argue that lack of exposure to the sort of critical thinking that high-level education should provide leaves audiences more, not less prone to manipulation. After all, critical reactions to Beethoven's works written by highly accomplished musicians and critics appeared continuously throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, precisely during the period of his music's greatest influence.

As but one example, to turn to the Beethoven-Rossini pairing that initiates Vol. 4, let us assume for the purpose of argument that the lovers of Rossini's music tended to be less intellectually sophisticated (or, to a populist's view, less "pretentious") than the admirers of Beethoven's more learned music, and that they supported Rossini's music "spontaneously." Let us also assume, following Tia DeNora's theory (which Taruskin cites approvingly, Vol. 5, p. 306 and implicitly in Vol. 3), that Beethoven's reputation derived exclusively from an aristocratic "prestige machine" so effective that not only did it within a short time period manage to convince many listeners to judge this unusual music in a positive fashion, but it has continued to convince listeners of the music's intrinsic value almost two centuries after Beethoven's death.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> See Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Londong: University of California Press, 1995). This is to accept, for heuristic purposes, Tia DeNora's claim that Beethoven's high reputation in his own time was the result of a prolonged validation campaign by aristocrats; the actual aristocrats involved in this decades-long campaign changed, but the tactics didn't. Apparently some of the aristocrats participated in this campaign without actually liking or understanding Beethoven's music, and some without even being aware that they were participating in a campaign. According

However, in a listener-centered aesthetic, reactions to Beethoven's music, even if they were shaped by a prestige machine, should possess the same validity as the "spontaneous" reactions to Rossini's music. For the historian, politically engaged or not, it should then be the task to uncover the ideologies underlying both sets of reactions. Surely not all the supporters of Rossini's music were uneducated laymen and -women; surely his music was involved with structures of power. Taruskin has effectively questioned the dominance of "elite" validations of Beethoven's music that led twentieth-century histories of music to downplay or even erase Rossini's tremendous influence throughout the nineteenth century. However, he has not questioned the role of Rossini and his followers in shaping the tastes of his era *at all*. After all, Rossini was, in the cultural sphere, undoubtedly a leading member of the power elites of his age.

A more complicated problem arising from Taruskin's conspiratorial theory of history then appears: the brute fact of Rossini's enduring popularity ceases being a fact the deeper one moves into the twentieth century, as Rossini's music lost much of its popularity, whereas Beethoven's music didn't. What is more, the fact that nineteenth-century audiences loved Rossini's music changed its significance in the early twentieth century, as composers and critics increasingly viewed it as revelatory of the superficiality of mass-audience tastes. In other words, changes in societal conditions and ideological structures alter the significance for a later period of any given composer's popularity in a previous period. Taruskin repeatedly questions the validity of such historical reinterpretations, but they are part and parcel of the history of any art form. If they are not to be

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to this theory, Franz Josef Haydn and other leading musicians praised Beethoven's talent only because they were constrained to do so or were bewitched by the new discourse of genius (p. 89). By these means, DeNora undermines every positive reaction to Beethoven's music among his contemporaries, implying that Jan L. Dussek, Joseph Woelffl, or any other composer could have filled the role in a similarly-designed validation campaign. Peter Kivy, in the chapter "Beethoven Again" from *The Possessor and the Possessed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), has effectively demonstrated the severe logical and historical shortcomings in DeNora's theory.

One might note that it is realistic to assume that at least some of the aristocrats participating in this supposed campaign must have done so in the hopes of cashing in on Beethoven's future success. There were, however, many composers of the time who were far more eligible candidates for success than Beethoven, all of whom were far less obstreperous. In addition, one must point out that most of the aristocrats who supported Beethoven's career did so at a monetary loss, and none of them derived significant economic or social profit from the successes he did achieve; in some cases, such as those of Princes Kinsky and Lichnowsky, the financial support of Beethoven proved to be a major burden.

There is one possibility that DeNora never seriously considers, but for which there exists abundant evidence: namely, that however much aristocrats and others might have been influenced by a validation campaign, many real, individual humans held genuine respect for Beethoven's gifts and truly loved his music.



allowed, then he perhaps should not have written a history of Western music that attempts to cook the books in favor of past composers he favors. It seems wiser to admit that re-interpretation by any historical period of a previous period is itself a historical fact, and as such has as much legitimacy as any other fact;<sup>85</sup> these are part and parcel of the interpretation history of any work or any composers' oeuvre. Taruskin makes this point in his Introduction (".although it is part of history and, like everything else, deserving of report" [p. XVII]), but contradicts himself constantly.

Thus, it often appears that Taruskin likes certain facts more than others, namely those supporting his bias toward the "non-elite" approach to music. This bias is part and parcel of the "culture wars" of the last few decades to define and articulate "non-elite" interests, which have been fought perhaps most vociferously in elite academic institutions. As Taruskin himself has spent practically his entire career in such institutions, it is no surprise that his characterization of non-elite tastes is intellectualized and in general defined negatively (i.e., as "what the elites missed" rather than "what the non-elites wanted"); as such, it appears to reflect more Taruskin's war with the academy that has nurtured his career than an authentic attempt to let non-elite voices speak for themselves. To use but one example, it is certainly doubtful that most American non-elites today would have any interest in one of Taruskin's specialties, namely the resuscitation of once-prominent Russian composers of the nineteenth century. Much of Taruskin's populism seems aimed more at berating his academic colleagues than at reaching non-elites directly by discussing and analyzing their tastes, whether they be Madonna, Backstreet Boys, or Lady Gaga. Unfortunately, when he repeatedly hurls the charges such as "academic" or "elite" about as if they were insults, he takes advantage of and encourages "know-nothing" attitudes prevalent in our society.

However, in order to write a *history* in which the "non-elites" eventually win out over the "elites," or in which the elites will be exposed in their nefarious machinations, one will need to start quarrels not only with all one's colleagues, but also with one's historical sources. As a result of his theoretical deficit, Taruskin is constantly tempted to leap in and imply that such and such a historical elite practice was the result of thought errors to which humans are prone; "there *they* go again" should perhaps have been the subtitle of Taruskin's historical epic. If people apparently loved Brahms's music, this must have been because they were ideologically conditioned by a prestige machine, but if they loved Tchaikovsky's music, it was because it spoke directly to their tastes. The empirical fabric of history

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<sup>85</sup> Changing or hiding the historical facts is not allowed, though. Taruskin is correct to point out factually misrepresentative statements made by other historians; see, for example, Vol. 3, pp. 7-8. Unfortunately, as will be clear in the Part 2 of this review, Taruskin clearly ignores inconvenient historical facts when it is advantageous for him to do so.

therefore becomes ideologized ("people *shouldn't* have thought this way") without any guiding ideational structure beyond the passive acquiescence to those audience tastes of which Taruskin approves and undying suspicion of those (namely, the "elite"-conditioned) he doesn't.

Of course, the darlings of audience tastes over the last few centuries have in general also been the economic winners of their own historical eras.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the most pernicious aspect of Taruskin's ideology is that it usually validates these winners and seeks to deprive the losers of any right to appeal.<sup>87</sup> At times it resembles a capitalist transformation of Hegelian-Marxist historicism, in that it makes the success of today's economic victors appear to be the result of an inevitable historical process. Karl Popper's criticism of the Hegelian-style history applies here as well: one is essentially claiming that *might* equals *right*. If a minority group dares make a claim that other types of music are possible than those practiced by the most successful composers, Taruskin dismisses these claims as "elite," and sides with the winners. Especially in his history of the twentieth century, Taruskin creates a drama in which again and again the winners of their day are presented as underdogs. Although they lack respect from the "elites," they seem inevitably bound to triumph over them owing to their connection to the needs of "society."

## **F. Setting: The Late Twentieth Century**

With the background of the basic assumptions and pitfalls of Taruskin's historical method set forth, it is possible to proceed to the dramatic high point of his attempt to re-write musical history on the basis of a listener-centered ideology, namely the sustained challenge he presents to post-WW II Modernism<sup>88</sup> in the final volume of his history. Taruskin portrays post-WW II Modernism as an extreme manifestation of Romanticism, which he describes as an "asocial," composer-centered ideology. Taruskin focuses a great deal upon serialism and Milton Babbitt's influence on the post-WW II musical community, but the charges of "asocial" or "elite" extend as well to most academic composers, whether or not they were serialists (most were

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<sup>86</sup> For example, Taruskin is plainly fascinated by the popular and economic success of his favored composers; see, for example, his account of Gershwin's popularity and triumphant European tour, Vol. 4, pp. 627-628, and of the triumph of Minimalism in Vol. 5.

<sup>87</sup> To be fair, Taruskin does mention some forgotten composers with some sympathy, but it is not clear why, except to drive home the point that a bigger name obscured their success. If he were to claim that the intrinsic value of their music was not recognized in its own time (and perhaps is still not recognized), he would be employing a Modernist trope that violates his sociological credo.

<sup>88</sup> In fact, Taruskin is referring to a late form of Modernism that Art Berman called Formalism; see fn. 1 above.

not, as Josef Straus has demonstrated);<sup>89</sup> they are applied also to independent figures such as Elliott Carter and experimental composers such as John Cage and Morton Feldman. Taruskin views all of these approaches as failed experiments owing to their being rooted in the "poietic fallacy." Although a listener-centered aesthetic was actually in widespread circulation in Western art music throughout most of the twentieth century, Taruskin posits it as his own discovery, which he employs in the service of "overcoming" the previous fallacious ideology. A sprinkling of ethnocentrism is added to the mix: as the seat of Taruskin's "Romanticism" is Germany, the entire composer-centered ideology is tarred with German nationalism and branded an alien ideology.<sup>90</sup>

There are three central components to Taruskin's historical dramatization of conflicts that he perceives in the history of modern music.

1) Taruskin believes that an "unhealthy" split developed over the last two hundred years between composers and the audience,<sup>91</sup> with the main villains being a) the "false ideology" of (German) Romanticism, with its "poietic fallacy" and its tendency to foster "asocial" behavior, b) Modernism, and c) post-tonality.

2) Taruskin places the crisis point in the post-WW II period, when an elite core of serialists, proudly alienated from "the audience," "took over" the academy in the United States. He cites Clement Greenberg's influential article, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," and claims that composers were living either in history (the serialists) or in time (the audience-oriented composers).<sup>92</sup> The music of the serialists presented the most extreme manifestation of the "literate" side of the Western tradition: the score (the text) was paramount, and performers and listeners expendable.

3) Taruskin, the social physician, requires that this split be healed; he aims to accomplish this by exposing false validation schemes of the elites and bringing producers and consumers closer together. Through the

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<sup>89</sup> Op. cit. (see fn. 60 above).

<sup>90</sup> The site of Taruskin's ethnocentric decision concerning what is "alien" or not is the United States, even though this history is supposed to be that of Western music.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Vol. 2, pp. 735-739. Oddly enough, Taruskin does not notice any correlation between, on the one hand, the "hundredfold" increase in the audience in the nineteenth century (p. 736), the vast increase in the number of performers trained, the expansion of publishing, and so forth; and on the other, the concurrent influence of Romantic ideas and the diffusion of a new, composer-centered aesthetic (which would therefore be bound to commit the dreaded poietic fallacy), in which Beethoven's music played a central role. Rather, the latter are treated almost exclusively as a dangerous harbinger of what he claims is a fundamental twentieth-century rift between producers (composers) and consumers ("the audience").

<sup>92</sup> This is precisely the sort of "Either/Or" Taruskin inveighed against in his Introduction. A Modernist might reply: it is possible to live in a present shot through with history.

"cunning of history,"<sup>93</sup> one split is nearly healed by the end of the book, via Taruskin's stacking his closing chapters with tonal composers (for example, Vol. 5, p. 454) and eliminating from consideration nearly all post-tonal composers in the world. However, through another sort of cunning, his resolution also apparently requires, with ever-intensified urgency, the termination of the history of Western music as a literate art form. This grand drama is presented in piecemeal form throughout the last three volumes of Taruskin's epic, spiraling ever more urgently toward the end of Western music as he reaches the conclusion of his task.

There are severe problems with this theory and its dramatic enactment in history, rooted in Taruskin's apparent inability to decide whether he wants to tell an objective history, a politically engaged history, or a Hegelian-tinged historical myth. Although Taruskin might object that this is a falsely conceived "Either/Or" dichotomy (Vol. 1, p. XIX), sometimes options are indeed mutually exclusive. The principles articulated in his Introduction should force him to take responsibility for deciding whether he is going to tell history "as it was" or "as it should have been." Taruskin, though, reading over the shoulders of his historical subjects, has decided "what it meant" for them; even more, he has decided, "where it's going" and "what it all means."

As a politically engaged history, his message is muddled and ineffective, as he offers no credible means or hope for counteracting the influence of the "elites" and minimizing societal differences, unless this is to be achieved by having the literate culture swallowed up by the non-literate.<sup>94</sup> As a historical myth, his story is difficult to fathom. For at least fifteen hundred pages he has portrayed a fundamental rent in Western musical culture (caused by the poietic fallacy and a composer-centered ideology), and it is his aim to heal this rift. Once he has stage-managed a "return of the audience," with composers finally meeting its needs, one would think everyone but the Modernists would close with a grand, triumphant chorus: the composers are tamed, the listeners are happy. Rather, Taruskin, perhaps in the service of his goal of societal leveling, has decided to pull the rug out from under both composers and listeners and finish off their art form for them. One wonders why the composers should have even bothered winning the audience back. Taruskin appears to be attempting to wrap up two story lines at once, the second being the

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<sup>93</sup> Taruskin apparently does not realize that his narrative reproduces much of the Hegelian dynamic of reason revealing itself in history, including his "cunning of history." In Taruskin's plot, a ragged group of iconoclasts (the Minimalists) rejected by the serial orthodoxy of the academy end up unwittingly being the agents of history: they overturn the entire edifice of atonalism, thereby restoring tonality, the connection with the audience, and any number of other beneficial side-effects.

<sup>94</sup> As discussed above, Taruskin's political program, such as it is, contains a disturbing component of either totalitarian or "mob-rule" egalitarianism.

reconciliation with the audience, resolving the historical sin of letting composers out of their subsidiary roles as servants to it. The first and more fundamental story line would be the resolution of the "original sin" of Western music, namely the fact that it is a literate art form and therefore fosters social difference. The resolution of both story lines at once appears forced; as a historical drama, it lacks sufficient motivation. As a quasi-Hegelian historicist drama of reason unfolding itself in history, it is plainly irrational.

The most fundamental problem with Taruskin's story as *history*, though, lies in its reliability: it simply does not sufficiently match the historical record. It leaves out of account wide swaths of significant new music written during the post-WWII period. It ignores practically all events at most of the main festivals of new music after 1945. It is blatantly ethnocentric and even imperialist, treating America as the post-WW II center of the world for new music (Vol. 5, pp. XIX-XX), when it has in many respects been at the periphery of the far more lively and dynamic European scene. During this period (as will be more fully discussed in the case studies in Part 2 of this review), new music as a public art form—i.e., taking Taruskin at his word and excluding "elite," "asocial" university performances—has in the United States enjoyed but a fraction of the funding, infrastructure, recordings, radio broadcasts, and audience attendance and support of its far more successful European counterpart.

Taruskin the ideologist of tonal restoration may believe he is entitled to ignore evidence germane to his topic, but Taruskin the historian should have shown more respect for the standards of his profession. Rather than offering the fairly objective sort of history he had promised in his Introduction and the reliable sort of recounting that would live up to the "Oxford" label, Taruskin's history in fact appears to fit fairly precisely his own definition of propaganda on p. XVIII of Vol. 1: "historiography that consciously colludes with a master narrative." For it is difficult to imagine Taruskin not being fully conscious when—but three pages earlier<sup>95</sup>—he set forth the core postulate of his grand narrative for Western music, one requiring the demise of the entire art form.

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<sup>95</sup> On p. XV; see fn. 14 above.